Between Continuity and Innovation: Transitional Nature of Post-independence Somali Poetry and Drama 1960s – the Present

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Abstract

This study explores the transitional nature of post-independence Somali poetry and drama. It examines this in the context of the historical, political and social changes that have taken place in Somalia in the period leading up to and following independence in 1960. This is viewed as a period of transition from a traditional way of life to a modern one and from pre-colonial and colonial systems to an unsuccessful nation-state building. The purpose of the study is to examine the salient features of post-independence Somali poetry and drama with a view to determine whether these features display evidence that these two forms are both in a state of transition.

To achieve this goal extensive research, collecting data and analysing it, was undertaken. This study, which explores a subject that has never been studied before, draws on original sources of Somali poetry and drama. Different research methods were applied, including examination of source texts, interviews, archival research and conversations with people involved in the field. This led to the conclusion that post-independence Somali poetry and drama, both of which are the product and expression of a historical period of transition, appear to be in a transitional state. The term ‘transitional’ is used in the sense that the poetry and drama in question are in a passage between traditional and modern ways of cultural expression, between orality and writing and between conformity to tradition and responding to the pressures and influences of a changing, modern life.

By exploring, for the first time, the significant changes in post-independence Somali poetry, which gave it the stated transitional character, this thesis makes an original contribution to the study of Somali literature. Another original contribution emerges from the uncovering of the nature of Somali drama as an art form in transition. Highlighting the links which the stated literary developments have with the unprecedented, political, social and economic changes and crisis that have taken place in post-independence Somalia, may help towards better understanding of Somali realities and the root causes of the current Somali predicament.

CONTENTS

A note on the spelling of Somali names

Due to the absence of an official system for writing Somali before 1972, the name of a Somali author may be found written in confusingly different ways, depending on the language used in writing the work in hand. For example, one may find the first name of the well known historian, Shiikh Jaamac Cumar Ciise, written in different sources using different languages as Shiikh Jaamac (Somali), Sheikh Jama (English), Cheek Djama (French) or Sceek Giama (Italian). To minimise such a confusion, libraries with substantial holdings in the Somali field have adopted a system for cataloguing Somali entries recommended by the late Professor Andrzejewski (1980) based on the official Somali script and customary naming order.

In Somali tradition, surnames are not used. Persons are identified by their given names followed by the names of their fathers and grandfathers. In accordance with this and in conformity to the above mentioned system proposed by Andrzejewski, names of Somali authors in this study are not inverted. All Somali names are given in the official Somali orthography, unless a different spelling of the name of an author is used on the title page of his or her work. For the reader unfamiliar with the Somali orthography, most sounds are pronounced more or less the same as in English apart from the following: 'c' is the voiced pharyngeal fricative, the 'ayn of Arabic, 'x' is used for the voiceless pharyngeal fricative, 'q*'* is used for the uvular stop which may be pronounced voiced or voiceless according to context, 'kh*'* is the voiceless uvular fricative (only found in Arabic loan words) and 'dh*'* is the voiced retroflex plosive. Short vowels are written with a single letter and long vowels with a double vowel letter.

Many Somali authors are best known by their nicknames, sometimes used as pen-names as well. The use of nicknames is generally very common in Somali tradition. Many people use it for purposes somewhat parallel to those for which surnames are used in Western cultures. To turn this rather confusing anomaly into a potential advantage, I propose to treat in this study Somali nicknames as though they were surnames, i.e. to begin entries on the references list (where relevant) with the author's nickname followed by a comma, followed by his official name (e.g. Hadraawi, Maxamed Ibraahim Warsame). This may help faster reference to the author in question, given the extensive use of nicknames by Somalis, who may only identify persons with their nicknames. In the body of the thesis, nicknames are marked by quotation marks, at least at the first occurrence of the author's name.

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To them all I say *mahadsanidin*.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

In this study I examine the existence of transitional characteristics in post-independence Somali poetry and drama and how this relates to the broader social and historical context, namely, to the changes that were taking place in Somalia in the period leading up to and following independence in 1960. The study focuses on a number of salient features of these twin literary forms, both of which appear to be the result of a process of transition from traditional ways of cultural expression to modern ones, thus blending features of both. The main emphasis is placed on major aspects of the form of the post-independence poetry as well as central elements of play construction in the post-independence drama. The latter includes the themes, techniques, characterisation and method of production. Emerging trends pertaining to both the poetry and the drama are considered in this context.

The findings of my research suggest that both the poetry and the drama of the post-independence period incorporate traditional and modern aspects in an organic union; they do so by using traditional techniques to tackle contemporary issues inspired by modern life. The way in which these different sets of elements are combined indicates that post-independence Somali literature is under pressure from two opposing influences, namely, the influence of the tradition of which this literature is a direct descendant and that of modern life from which it takes its immediate inspiration. This is the main area where the transitional nature of post-independence Somali poetry and drama may be discerned. Here ‘transitional nature’ means on the one hand that these literary forms capture a period of transition in Somali history of which they are the product; they capture it by mirroring its realities and by meeting its needs. On the other hand the twin literary forms themselves appear to be in a state of transition, ‘transition’ as passage from the traditional ways of versification and performance to modern-oriented ones which will be detailed below.

Poetry and drama are the two leading forms of contemporary Somali literature, and the two are closely interrelated. In traditional Somali society, poetry was the leading form of cultural expression with a pivotal role to play in society. As Said (1982) argues, 'whereas in the industrialized West, poetry – and especially what is regarded as serious poetry – seems to be increasingly relegated to a marginal place in society, Somali oral verse is central to Somali life, involved as it is in the intimate workings of people's lives' (Said, 1982: 2). Scholars from different times have extensively commented on the unusual place of poetry in Somali society and on several of its main aspects; see for example, Hunter 1880; Kirk 1905; Laurence 1956; Andrzejewski and Galaal 1963; Andrzejewski and Lewis 1964; Johnson 1996b; Said, 1982, 1989; Abdisalam 1977; Banti, 1996; Banti, and Giannattasio, 1996: Orwin, 2000, 2003). Somalis divide their poetry into two broad categories: *maanso-goleed* (serious poetry of the public forum) and *maanso-maaweelo* or *hees*, which is light poetry meant for entertainment (see Jaamac, 1974: Axmed, 1993). The latter is further broken into two categories: *hees-hiddeed* (traditional song), which consists of *hees-hawleed* (work songs) and *hees-cayaareed* (dance songs), and *hees-casri* (modern song). See the next chapter for details.

Despite the relatively extensive attention given to the study of certain aspects of Somali poetry, a number of important developments pertaining to this poetry have escaped scholarly notice; the fact that Somali poetry is changing with the dramatic changes which have taken place in Somali society (see the next section) remained largely unnoticed in scholarly works on the subject. In the post-independence era major changes seem to have been taking place in important aspects of form. Certain techniques and poetic inclinations which once featured prominently in Somali classical[1] verse seem to be disappearing, some of them being replaced by alternative ones; for instance, while Somali classical poets used to give marked preference to the genre of *gabay* for serious matters, post-independence poets have shifted such a preference from the *gabay* (a long-lined genre) to a number of short-lined genres traditionally restricted to light verses meant for entertainment. Among the latter genres

1 This term will be discussed in the next chapter.

the *jiifto* in particular appears to have taken precedence over the *gabay* in recent decades. The other relatively recent changes include the disappearance of certain features: *luuq* (melodic chant), *arar* (elaborate poetic introduction) and *faan* (poetic boasting). All these changes and the nature of the poetic techniques involved will be discussed in detail in chapter 3, and this is the first time these developments have been discussed in a scholarly work.

On the other hand, it should be observed that the stated changes have not extended thus far to the structural devices of *miisaan* (metre) and *xarafraac* (alliteration), two long established tools which have regulated the structure of all types of Somali poetry for as long as we know. Chapter 4 is devoted to discussing these particular devices and how they have resisted modern attempts to change them. The co-existence of these change-defying devices side by side with the changing features mentioned above is a major area in which the transitional nature of post-independence Somali poetry is discerned, and this previously overlooked aspect of Somali poetry is where the present study attempts to make a new, significant contribution.

Since the Second World War new literary forms began to emerge as an outgrowth of the traditional Somali poetry (see Andrzejewski et al, 1985; Johnson, 1996b). The new forms include modern popular songs (*hees-casri*), *maanso-goleed* with new themes and techniques, and full length stage drama which incorporates modern poetry as a major component and so the transitional drama under investigation in this study was part of the above metamorphosis. Although performances incorporating enactment and dialogue always existed in the Somali traditional culture, stage drama based on full length plays was an innovation associated with the above mentioned developments which began in the early 1940s (Andrzejewski, 1978; Maxamed Daahir, 1987). In spite of its relative recentness, Somali drama, an orally based art of a comic and satirical nature, soon gained astonishing popularity with urban Somalis. As observed by Andrzejewski, 'from its inception Somali theatre won the interest of the public masses, and it soon became a powerful means of influencing public opinion' (Andrzejewski, 1978: 87 – 8).

Unlike poetry, very little attention has been given to the study of Somali drama, despite

its importance indicated by Andrzejewski. One important aspect of this drama which deserves scholarly attention appears to be its blend of different elements from different, sometimes contrasting sources: traditional and modern, indigenous and foreign, comic and serious. It is important to look into the way in which the opposing influences of tradition and modernity are present in post-independence Somali plays in what looks like an organic union, and how this demonstrates a transitional characteristic in this drama. This aspect of post-independence Somali drama, which has never been examined in any previous scholarly work, is explored in chapters 5 and 6 where this study seeks to make another new contribution to Somali literary studies. It seeks to do so by examining the presence of the above elements in the major aspects of Somali play construction, aspects such as themes, techniques and production methods. In this examination, which also includes post-independence Somali poetry, the current study draws in its conclusions on the findings of extensive research using various tools detailed below.

1.2 Research question and objectives

The central question of this study is: are there significant features of post-independence Somali poetry and drama which demonstrate that these two literary forms are of a transitional nature, and if so how is this related to the wider context, i.e. to the historical and social changes in Somalia in the period leading up to and following Somali independence in 1960? As my central hypothesis, I argue that post-independence Somali poetry and drama, both being the product and expression of a period of transition in Somali history, appear to be in a transitional state; transitional in the sense that they are in a passage between traditional and modern ways of cultural expression, between orality and writing, and between conformity to tradition and responding to the pressures and influences of a changing, modern life. Poets and playwrights derive elements from Somali oral tradition and adjust them to the needs of presenting modern themes relevant to contemporary society. In the case of the poetry the transitional nature is discerned in the state of being half-way between conforming to tradition and adhering to the requirements of modern times. In the first it keeps with the use of certain traditional elements of form such as alliteration (*xarafraac*) and metre (*miisaan*) while in the second it turns away from

other traditional elements such as the melodic chant (*luuq*) and the extensive poetic introduction (*arar*). The transition is also discerned in the shifting genre preference from the pre-dominance of the *gabay* to the increasing precedence of the *jiifto*. Added to these is the outgrowth of new poetic forms from the old, traditional ones. Another aspect in which the transitional nature is detected is the changing method of poetry transmission from the traditional oral medium to a blend of traditional orality, new techno-orality and the beginnings of writing (see chapter 3). Likewise, the post-independence drama – which has close links with the poetry, as will be elucidated – appears to be in a state of transition from the traditional way of dialogue and evening performances meant for self entertainment to a full length stage drama performed on a raised platform to a seated audience; added to this is that this drama seems to be in transition in the sense that it has started to use writing on a limited scale without reaching as yet the stage of reliance on fully scripted plays.

This study aims therefore to achieve the following objectives:

- To examine salient features of post-independence Somali poetry and determine whether these features display evidence that this poetry is in a state of transition.
- To identify and analyse major aspects of post-independence Somali drama and discern the presence of evidence of similar, transitional characteristics in this drama as well.

It is the first time that these issues in Somali literature have been considered in a scholarly work and this is one of the main aspects of the importance of the current study. Another aspect is that the exploration of the transitional nature of post-independence Somali literature represented by poetry and drama, in the context of the historical and social realities of the Somali society of the time, which appears to be in a similar state of transition, would help towards a better understanding of Somalia; more so when one considers the well known fact that literature is where Somalis express themselves best and that it is the mirror that most truthfully reflects

the inner workings of Somali life and way of thinking. The study of Somali literature from this perspective could therefore provide important insights into the better understanding of not only the changing status of contemporary Somali literature but also the unusual and puzzling developments and unprecedented crisis that have taken place in Somalia over the last couple of decades, developments that have baffled political scientists; hence, the importance and the timeliness of the present study.

To achieve the above objectives I have engaged in extensive research work, collecting source materials and analysing the resultant data. The study draws on original source materials of Somali poetry and drama. The research methods applied include interviews, textual and extra-textual examination, archival research, as well as extensive conversations with practitioners of Somali poetry and drama. Furthermore the research follows on from the author's previous work and from his experience and long involvement in the field as a Somali literary practitioner, literary researcher, former theatre director and lead organiser of or frequent participant in literary conferences and seminars.

1.3 The structure of the study

The structure of this study is informed by its objectives as formulated above. To achieve these objectives, the study is organised in seven chapters in the following sequence. The current introductory chapter is followed by chapter 2, which presents nomenclature and categorisation of Somali poetry types. It offers a discussion clarifying the definitions of terms frequently used in the chapters that follow; they are also frequently used in the literature on Somali poetry at large. This leads to a further review of relevant literature. The chapter places special emphasis on the clarification of the way in which the stated terms are applied in the present study. The use of terminology in naming the Somali modern song is presented and this leads to the discussion of the transitional nature of this form of Somali poetry. In relation to this, the chapter brings to the attention of students of Somali literature the history and nature of the *qaraami* poetry of the 1930s – which has hitherto been neglected in the literature on Somali poetry – as the initial nucleus of modern

Somali poetry.

Chapters 3 and 4 complement each other. Together, they present the core of the analysis of the transitional nature of post-independence Somali poetry. Chapter 3 investigates how some salient aspects of Somali traditional poetry have changed in the post-independence era. It presents evidence suggesting that the predominance of the *gabay* genre is shrinking, the use of melodic chant (*luuq*) is dwindling and the presence of the elaborate poetic introduction is fading away. The emerging precedence of the *jiifto* genre over the *gabay* is highlighted. On the other hand, chapter 4 focuses on the unchanged aspects of the form of this poetry. Here, the two most salient features which regulate the structure of Somali poetry are presented; these are *xarafraac* (alliteration) and *miisaan* (metre). The chapter provides evidence of the continued use of these traditional techniques. It then concludes with an argument that the combination of the continued use of the traditional features presented in this chapter and the changing ones explored in the preceding one displays evidence of the transitional characteristics of the post-independence Somali poetry.

Chapter 5 attempts to shed light on various aspects of Somali drama with a view to determine its transitional characteristics. The salient presence of influences of both tradition and modernity in post-independence Somali plays is explored. This discussion continues in chapter 6 which is particularly devoted to the in-depth analysis of a representative play, namely a popular play called *Shabeelnaagood*. The chapter detects transitional characteristics in the main aspects of this play, such as its themes, characters and dramatic techniques. It offers an extensive analysis of the playwright's use of elements carried over from the Somali oral tradition such as alliterative verse, riddles, proverbs and poetic questioning. The playwright's adjustment of these traditional techniques to serve the needs of his modern themes, and how the transitional nature of the play is evident in this combination is extensively analysed.

Chapter 7 concludes the study by summing up the main arguments and conclusions. It examines the extent to which the research objectives presented in this introductory

chapter have been achieved. It also highlights the relevance of the study and the contributions it makes to knowledge in the field. Alongside this, the inevitable limitations of the study are pointed out. Based on this, the chapter concludes with a number of recommendations for future research.

1.4 Situating the transition: contextual background

If 'every historical epoch writes its own poetry or rather expresses itself in an appropriate idiom in the poetry of its most committed and sensitive minds' (Amuta, 1989:176), the Somali case is not an exception. The 'historical epoch' that witnessed the rise of Somali post-independence poetry and drama was one characterised by rigorous, social, political and economic changes (Touval, 1963; Andrzejewski, 1967, 1982; Lewis, 1988; Abdi I. Samatar, 1989; Maxamed Daahir, 1994; Johnson, 1996b.)

To understand the nature of the Somali poetry and drama of the stated period and to contextualise their presumed transitional nature, it is necessary to have a picture of the changing socio-political and economic realities in Somalia, i.e., of the historical and social changes that inspired the rise of these literary forms. This will also help identify the factors that have influenced the status of this literature as an art in transition.

To this end, I shall endeavour to provide in the following pages a brief description of the rapid historical changes in Somalia since the Second World War and the impact of these changes on the literary scene. Special emphasis will be placed on the transitional nature given by these changes to the post-war Somali society and how such a transitional nature is reflected in the post-independence poetry and drama. The stated changes in Somali society began in the period commencing around the end of the World War One, which coincided with the collapse of the Dervish Movement led by Sayid Maxamed Cabdulle Xasan in 1922.[2] This period, which

2 The history of this movement is well documented by both indigenous and foreign scholars. For details see Jardine, 1923; Labrouse, 1970; Jaamac, 1976; Said, 1982; Laitin and Said, 1987; Abdi Sheik-Abdi, 1993.

extended to the few decades following the independence of Somalia in 1960, was a period of unprecedented transformations in Somali history and society.

In pre-colonial times, the Somali traditional way of life, which depended on 'four main economic systems – the pastoral nomad, the agriculturalist, the town dweller and the coastal merchant' (Johnson, 1996:1) had continued to influence all forms of Somali cultural expression. By the turn of the 20th century, however, colonial powers came to Somalia with a new system.

In the late nineteenth century, following the partition of Africa by European powers in 1884 – 5, the British, Italian, French and Ethiopian powers occupied the Somali territories. However, despite this official commencement of the colonial era, nothing fundamental had changed in Somali life during the first quarter of the 20th century, as the actual occupation by colonial powers often proved to be a long process which took several decades. The interaction between the Somalis and the new foreign rulers was kept to a minimum until around World War II (Cassanelli, 1982; Lewis, 1988).

In his interesting 'reconstruction' of Somali history, Lee Cassanelli explains the main reason for the very slow pace of the European occupation process in the Horn of Africa:

> In Somalia, . . . the Italians did not move to occupy the Southern interior until 1908, and not until well into the 1920s were they and the British able to "pacify" parts of the northern and central peninsula. One reason for the slow pace of European penetration in the Horn was the determined Somali resistance that colonial forces encountered in many locales. The best known of the Somali resistance movements was that led by the famous shaykh, warrior, and poet, Muhammad Abdullah Hassan, known to the Europeans of the time as the "Mad Mullah". This charismatic leader was without question the dominant Somali personality of the early twentieth century; and his twenty-one-year desert war against British, Italian and Ethiopian forces in northern Somaliland clearly merits the attention it has received from foreign and Somali scholars. (Cassanelli, 1982:183-5).

By the late 1920s and early 1930s, substantial social and political developments

were set in motion; but it was only during and immediately after World War II that these changes were dramatically accelerated into new heights culminating in substantial developments in various spheres: political, social and cultural (Yuusuf, 1996). A period of massive awakening and hopeful sense of national rejuvenation had taken shape (Maxamed Daahir, 1994).

Touval explains that the reshaping of Somali society was influenced by such factors as 'the development of commerce and industry, the growth of government bureaucracy, and the spread of a cash economy' (Touval, 1963: 82). To this can be added the introduction of modern education by the British and Italian colonial administrations (Fatoke, 1981-82); the unprecedented exodus from rural areas to the city (Abdi I. Samatar, 1989; Kapteijns, 1990, 1994); the emergence of a rapidly growing urban population; and the sweeping political drive for independence (in the post-war era) not only in Somalia but throughout Africa and the world.

All these led to the departure of sections of Somali society from the traditional modes of life to a modern-oriented one in rapidly burgeoning towns which served 'as a melting pot [that] had to accommodate all the diverse sub-cultures of those within its precincts.' (Ali, 1989: 62).

The result was a reshaped Somali society with many unfamiliar traits (both positive and negative) which amounted to a new Somali world, a development which prompted the poets of the time to express their initial surprise and increasing concern. The Somali poet habitually responds to virtually all significant developments in his society, either positively or negatively (Said, 1982: 62).

Xaaji Aadan Axmed "Afqallooc" wittily articulates his concern in a well-known poem called *Tabaalaha Wakhtiga* (The Troubles of our Time).[3] He presents a long list of previously unknown social behaviours, allocating a whole stanza to describe each of these new developments on the negative side. Each stanza concludes with the same refrain of two lines in which the poet reiterates his concern. Given below is one such stanza. In this passage the poet criticises the prevailing corruption in public

3 For an account on the life and work of this poet and the full text of this poem, together with an Italian Translation, see Antinucci and Axmed, 1986:87, 147ff; for a transcription of most of his poems with an introduction see Maxamed, 2008; for further biographical and bibliographical notes (in English) see Andrzejewski, 1985: 382).

services pointing an accusing finger to the unlawfully acquired wealth by members of the new privileged elite. He details their luxurious expenditure, which exceeds their legitimately known income:

> *Laba boqol nin maahiyaddi tahay, tirada loo dhiibo*
> *Oo toban baloodh jeexdayoo, tumanayoo keefa*
> *Oo biilka gini tuurayoo, tolaya nayloonka*
> *Oon tacabka baadiye lahayn, tuludi waa maadhe*
> *Iyana waa tabaalaha wakhtiga, taynu aragnaaye*
> *Tu kaloo ka daran baa jirtee, taana balaan sheego* (Maxamed, 2008: 94).
>
> A man who earns two hundred as a salary
> Yet acquired ten-hectare properties and indulges in self-enjoyment
> Who spends twenty for daily board and wears nylon clothing
> Who owned no property in the countryside
> This is one of the troubles of our time.[4]
> Let me tell you one more startling phenomenon.[5]

What was happening seems to be a challenging transition from an old order to a new one. The old one, i.e. the traditional way of life, was quite familiar. In traditional Somali society all aspects of life were governed in accordance with a clear code of ethics through long-established and well-balanced structures that had proven to fit people's way of life which inspired the formation of these structures (Maxamed, 1994). The new order, on the other hand, was not only unfamiliar but it lacked a clear sense of direction. In the following poetic passage, Cali Xirsi Cartan expresses such a confusion at the borderline between the old that was dwindling and the new that looked hazy:

> *Dharaartii duugantiyo*
> *Habeen iga daahan baan*
> *Dhexdood dalandoolayaa* (Cali, 1989).
>
> Between the daylight that has vanished[6]

4 The 'time' described by Xaaji Aadan in the poem was when members of the now dominant upper middle class of merchants, civil servants and high-ranking government officials began to emerge.

5 The traditional lifestyle of the majority of Somalis was pastoral, whereby the society's division into classes was near non-existent.

6 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Somali into English are mine. In translating poetic extracts, I endeavour to keep my translation as close to the original as English usage and word order permit. However, considering the vast structural difference between the two languages, I do not attempt to imitate Somali rhythmic patterns or alliteration; what I concern myself with most is to convey the meaning line by line as faithfully as possible.

> And the obscure night [that is forthcoming]
> I am baffled.

The attempted move towards building a new Somalia was perhaps motivated by rather ambitious aspirations influenced by the new material conditions and by the then prevailing global atmosphere of political upheavals, the sweeping drive for national independence and progress worldwide heightened by the aftermath of World War II.

However, due to the stated internal weaknesses, coupled with unfavourable external factors (Abdisalam, 1996), the new experience was bound to be thwarted by serious social contradictions and by leadership shortcomings. Thus, the transitional process collapsed in the middle of the way. The most difficult social contradictions came to the fore in the post-independence period and continued to be at work as obstacles to progress until they culminated in the total collapse of the modern Somali state by the beginning of 1990s.

The beginning of the decline dates back to 1969 when the elected civilian government was overthrown by a military coup led by General Siyaad Barre. Suddenly imposed and extremely centralised as the government was, the coup, which was alien to Somali culture, represented a gateway to a new political culture based on the rule of the gun (Ahmed, 1994).

The new regime abolished all democratically elected institutions by abrogating the constitution and the supreme court, abolishing the parliament and banning all activities of political parties and the free press. In what Ahmed calls an ‘odd but potent mixture of nationalism and new-Marxism’ (Ahmed, 1994: 116), the Supreme Revolutionary Council

> Stipulated that, in addition to undertaking responsibility for the basic infrastructure, the state would become the pivotal mechanism for the overall development of society in the key areas of economy, social life, and culture. (ibid).

The new regime’s announced policy of socio-political reform and nation-building initially attracted massive popular support:

> A stunning tide of popular energy not seen since the agitation for independence was released. Partly as a reaction to the deenergizing

> languor of the later stages of civilian rule and also as a response to the mobilising rhetoric of the SRC [Supreme Revolutionary Council], most Somalis felt a moment of pride and reconnection with the state, a reawakening of the umma spirit (ibid).

However, all this evaporated into thin air by the second half of the decade, as the regime revealed its true oppressive face. The initial public support turned into a general feeling of frustration and dissent which culminated in clan-based armed opposition which engaged in a violent conflict with the government. By the end of 1989, the situation reached the climax of a bloody civil war. The result was the death of thousands of people, the displacement of millions, the destruction of the country's entire infrastructure which included loss of most properties (both public and private), and, most significantly, the collapse of the central state and the subsequent disintegration of the entire civic society.

Abdisalam (1996) comments on the negative impact of such agonising developments on the mental state of the individual Somali:

> These events of deep social crisis created a void of norm which consequently led the individual Somali to total disarray, as well as mental and moral confusion. This socio-political chaos has weakened and confused the moral standards. (Abdisalam, 1996: 1).

In light of what has been discussed in the preceding pages, one can presume that the historical changes which gave contemporary Somali society its transitional nature, clearly reflected on the post-independence literature examined in this thesis. The changing context of the transitional nature discussed above appears to have given rise to and expressed itself in new forms of literature, largely poetry and drama with similarly transitional characteristics, and this is what the present study attempts to substantiate.

1.5 Situating the transition: conceptual background and definitions of the terms

The conceptual approach of this study and my application of the concepts 'transition' or 'transitional', 'tradition' and 'modern' are not located in any specific, previously formalised, theoretical framework; it is not the intention here to delve into the debate on the different, theoretical definitions and interpretations of these terms. Rather, the present study is anchored in the Somali context. It draws on perceptions sustained in the Somali mainstream discourse of the period leading up

to and following independence. Such a discourse and the sense in which the said terms were used are best expressed in the poetry and drama of the period, the subject of this study, as will be elucidated below. The Somali, pro-modern, political and cultural elites of the time, who acted as the shapers of the said discourse, perceived the stated period as an era of '*kala-guur* (transition)' (Cabdi, 2006: 48). Resting on the experience gained from the colonial administrations and influenced by foreign models, mainly European, and by the global changes of the time, the stated elites pursued a new vision, a vision of a modernised Somali society, an attempt 'to catapult Somalia into the ranks of other modern nation-states' (Kapteijns, 1999: 105). The bottom line of their discourse, which discloses their concept of 'transition', was to change their society from being predominantly rural, tribal entities under colonial administrations initially, or a new-borne, underdeveloped state later, to a modern nation-state, a highly ambitious project which was set to fail, because 'the gap between discourse and reality remained vast' (Kapteijns, 2009: 104**)**. They attempted to utilise 'the power of the past to mobilize Somalis for a particular vision of the future, namely, a modern, nationalist vision (ibid: 106). The mainstream discourse focused on the ambition to drive the country through the passage of progress towards a modernised future, leaving behind what the above mentioned elites regarded as obstacles to their project, such as 'ignorance (lack of [modern] education) and the smaller-scale communal identities based on clan and sub-clan' (ibid: 103).

It is particularly important here to point out that the two maxims of *casriyayn* (modernisation) and *kala-guur* (transition) were at the centre stage of the discourse described above (Cabdi, 2002; Xasan, 1997). On the first, Kapteijns stresses that 'there is no doubt that the *desire* to become *modern* [my emphasis] …was an integral part of the nationalist project of the 1960s and after' (ibid: 104). The Somali perception of a 'modern society' in the context of the above mentioned discourse, is elucidated by Kapteijns who points out that its dimensions included,

> Liberal belief in constitutional democracy and representative, accountable government; individual rights and freedoms, including equality before the law and freedom from government oppression; social progress derived from formal, modern education, based on

> European models; and economic development inspired by scientific and technological progress. (Kapteijns, 1999: 104).

This was the core of what the concept 'modern' meant to Somalis. These modern-oriented ideals were clearly reflected in the literature of the time in several ways. At one level the new ideas towards *casriyayn* were articulated in and disseminated through new forms of literature, such as modern songs (*hees-casri*), modernised oral poetry of public forum[7] and stage drama of comic and satirical nature. At another level the calls for modernisation extended from the broad spectrum of political and social life to the field of literary creation in particular.

To illustrate the way in which the discourse centring around the maxims of *casriyayn* and *kala-guur* was reflected in and disseminated by the new, *transitional* literature, let us consider some examples. In a play called *Inan Sabool* (Daughter of the Impoverished), composed in 1959 by Maxamed Ismaaciil "Barkhad-Cas", sometimes called Balaaya-cas, the conflict between right and wrong raged between three men by the names of Jahli, Qabiil and Damac, respectively symbolising ignorance, clannism and greed, on one side and a man called Cilmi (a descriptive name meaning knowledge) symbolising modern education on the other. *Inan Sabool*, the heroine, who gives the play its title, a beautiful girl from a poor family, is abducted and mistreated by the three men, until righteous Cilmi salvages her by defeating the evil men in a fight and eventually marrying the girl. To the Somali audience of the time, it was not difficult to decode the message. The girl stood for Somalia, suffering from the negative remnants of the past, such as clannism and ignorance, embodied in the characters of Jahli and Qabiil respectively. The country could only be freed from these evils by modern education (Xudeydi, 2011). Six years later another acclaimed playwright, Cali Sugulle, composed a play entitled *Himiladeenna* (Our Vision). In an interview I had with the playwright in Djibouti in July 1997, he related a detailed account of the play. He confirmed that his conception of the word 'vision' referred to in the title was the same as the one maintained in the above discourse about *kala-guur* (transition) and *casriyayn*

7 A detailed description of both *hees-casri* and the poetry of the public forum or *maanso-goleed* as well as the relationship between the two is provided in chapters 2 and 3.

(modernisation). The two sides of the main conflict in the play are between a young, Western educated man, Horseed, a descriptive name meaning vanguard, who serves as a director of a state agency, and representatives from his clan. The latter blames Horseed for failing his clan by giving jobs to qualified, educated people from other clans rather than giving them to unqualified members of his own clan who applied to the same jobs. He replies that this would obstruct the way to achieving *himiladeenna* (our vision). When they scornfully question the "*himiladeenna*" he talks about, he explains that it is to drive the country forward towards a better future by making use of modern facilities and by employing educated people. The purpose of the playwright was clear; he constructed this dramatic situation to create awareness of this kind of vision (*himilo*) among the audience of the play.

As indicated above, the key words of the aforesaid discourse, repeatedly articulated as maxims in the poetry and drama of the time were *kala-guur* (transition), *casriyayn* (modernisation), *geeddi* (trek or caravan) and *himilo* (vision). One more example, clearly illustrating the above statement is a famous poem, composed in 1972 by a celebrated poet-playwright, Cabdi Muxumed Amiin. It is a very powerful poetic pronouncement in which almost all the above key words feature either directly or indirectly in an interconnected manner. The poet spells out such a pronouncement right from the first words which serve as the title of the poem: *Waa kala guurkii* 'It is the transition [time]' (Cabdi, 2006: 48). In the poem, which later was frequently used by the national radio stations as a song sung by the poet himself with musical accompaniment, the poet gives a clear explanation of the notion '*kala-guur*' (transition). To present this he devises a familiar image from Somali pastoral life, an image frequently used by Somali poets and playwrights. It is the image of a trek, which means the move of a community of nomadic pastoralists from an area with no more grazing to another with new grazing. That is indicated in the second half of the compound word, *kala-guur* from the root *guurid* which means to move from one place to another. Eventually he makes the image even clearer with the use of the word '*geeddi*' (trek) which is a central element in the life of pastoral nomads. While the word '*guur*' means the action of moving, '*geeddi*' is the noun describing someone on the move or a travelling community of nomads. Using this image, which was very familiar to his Somali audience, the poet explains his view of where the Somalia of the time was moving from and where it aspired to move to. The

poem goes as follows:

Waa kala guurkii[8]
Waa kala guurkii
Waa kala guurkii
Wixii gadaal inoo dhigay
Dhaqammadii gaboobay
Laga gudbaayee
Garashada casriga
Oo aan gaasirnayn
Loo guurayee.

Waa kala guurkii
Habkii gaabiskee
La gurguuran jirey
Laga gudbaayee
Garmaamaynta orod
Iyo sida gammuun loo guurayee.
. . . . . .
Waa kala guurkii
Waxaa gablamay
Kii gaabiyee dib u soo gurtee
Geeddiga ka hara. (Cabdi, 2006: 48 – 9).

It is the transition time
It is the transition time
It is the transition time
[Time] to transcend the old traditions
That held us back
And move on
To the unlimited modern knowledge.

It is the transition time
[Time] to transcend the sluggish system
Where people moved slowly
And move on
In a high speed running
Like an arrow
. . . . . .
It is the transition time
Miserable is he
Who lags behind
Who fails to keep pace with the trek.

8 Note that in the written text of the poem, which was originally composed orally, *kala-guur* is written as two words, however, I prefer to write it as a compound word with a hyphen as it functions as one word in terms of meaning and this is the common way of writing it.

In another famous song composed in 1962, *Geeddiga Wadaay* (Keep the Trek Going), Cabdi Amiin utilises the same image of *geeddi*, highlighting the need to catch up on the level of development reached by other nations. In addition, he warns against the consequences of clannism which he depicts as an obstacle to progress, as did the two playwrights cited above. Commenting on this poem Andrzejewski explains that 'the title derives its imagery from the treks which the nomadic pastoralists undertake in search of new grazing, which the author uses as a symbol of the new Somalia moving on towards progress and prosperity' (Andrzejewski, 1975: 10). Hereunder is an extract from this poem:

> *Dadkii nala gudboonaa*
> *Dayaxuu u guuray*
> *Nin qabiil gargaaarsaday*
> *Meelna gaari maayee*
> *Guulaystayaalow*
> *Geeddiga wadaay* (Cabdi, 2006: 12 -3).
>
> Our equals
> Moved to the moon.
> He who turns to clannism
> Gets to nowhere.
> Oh blessed ones
> Keep the trek going!

Indeed, Cabdi's prophecy came true. The trek reached nowhere, probably because Somalis failed to stop '*qabiil gargaarsaday*', they continued turning to clannism.

It is worth noting here that in the expression '*dayaxuu u guuray*' ([other nations] moved to the moon) the combined influences of tradition and modernity are discerned. While the image of *guur*/*geeddi* comes from the influence of the poet's pastoralist background, the idea of moving to the moon is easily traceable to his exposure to external influence from the developed world where modern technology reached the extent of exploring the moon. In this poem it is important to take note of the poet's emphasis on the need to move on with the vision to achieve what others have achieved with the use of modern technology. This is the essence of the expressions '*geeddiga wadaay*' (keep the trek going)' and '*Dadkii nala gudboonaa dayaxuu u guuray* (Our Equals Moved to the Moon)'; hence, the centrality of the

concepts ‘transition’ and ‘modernity’ in the Somali discourse of the time reflected in the literature. In the context of that discourse the concepts of *kala-guur* and *geeddi*, repeatedly referred to, meant a multi-faceted transition that was underway in different aspects of Somali life. To many Somalis it was transition from a rural (predominantly pastoralist) lifestyle to a more advanced, modern, urban life administered by the institutions of a nation-state. At another level it was transition from clan consciousness based on kin loyalty to a higher form of national awareness based on patriotism or *Soomaalinimo* (Somalism), with high, often unrealistic, expectations of a rosy independence, one which was bound to vanish (Abdisalam, 1996: xi). At the cultural level, it was transition from a traditional oral culture to a new mixed culture with a remarkable orientation to and reliance on writing and reading.

In the above examples I have illustrated the Somali perspective with regards to the concepts ‘transition’ and ‘modern’ and how these concepts were expressed in and disseminated through the new forms of transitional poetry and drama. What needs to be underscored is that the new trend towards modernisation extended to the field of literature in a two-track development. On the one hand the new trend expressed itself in the emergence of a body of new literature of transitional nature, predominantly poetry and drama, with modern features combined with traditional ones. This shall be substantiated throughout the thesis. On the other hand, calls for modernisation extended from the broad societal level to the domain of literary creation, and this is what I shall describe in the paragraphs to follow, as an entry point to my definitions of the use in this study of the terms ‘modern’, ‘traditional’, ‘transition’ and ‘contemporary’ as drawn from the Somali perspective discussed in the preceding pages.

A central aspect of the trend towards modernisation in this field was the development of a written literature. Literary-minded Somalis championed the need to modernise the literary practice by developing it from oral to written; or in other words, they expressed the desire to promote and practice a Somali written literature after centuries of dominancy of oral literature. They believed that the key to this end was the development and introduction of a Somali script.

Remarkable work was done by various scholars towards this end. The historical development of this initiative and the nature of the different scripts proposed are well documented and it would be beyond the scope of this thesis to delve into it. Ample information about these matters is available in Andrzejewski, 1974 and in the works listed in the bibliography attached to it These efforts led to the official introduction in 1972 of the current Somali orthography using the Latin alphabet.

One of the positive impacts of this development was a general renaissance in Somalia's literary life.[9] As one aspect of such a resurgence of literary energy, a new debate raged since the mid-1970s on the need to modernise the two leading forms of Somali contemporary literature, namely the poetry and the drama. In this then new, literary wave, the central idea in the call to modernise Somali plays was to develop their production methods from orally-based to writing-based; in other words it was an attempt to encourage playwrights to make use of the written medium and produce scripted plays. The second aspect was to make better use of the facilities of modern technology in the audio visual aspects of the theatrical production, aspects such as lighting, voice and the stage setting. For details see Maxamed Daahir, 1987.

As part of this new trend fully scripted plays began to emerge for the first time, however short-lived. The initiators were a group of formally educated playwrights who were a minority in the field. One of these innovators, Axmed Cartan Xaange, wrote a play called *Samawada* in 1968 and this was the first scripted play that came out in written form in Somalia (Andrzejewski, 1975: 10); however, it was not staged and its popularity was limited. In the theme the playwright promoted the role of women in the new Somali society. The title character, Samawada, the heroine, is a committed lady who actively participated in the struggle for a modern Somali state. This was followed by a more popular play entitled *Aqoon iyo Afgarad* (Knowledge and Understanding). It came out in 1972 and was written jointly by a group of four playwrights described as '*masrixiyiintii ugu horreeyey ee heer jaamacadeed tacliintoodu ahayd*' (the first university graduate playwrights) in the country

9 See Andrzejewski, 1978 for more information.

(Muuse, 1976: 1). These were Maxamed Ibraahim Warsame "Hadraawi", Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac "Gaarriye", Siciid Saalax Axmed and Muuse Cabdi Cilmi. This play was staged two nights in Mogadishu and later it was published in book form (Hadraawi et al, 1976) by the Ministry of Education who included it in the curriculum as a reader for the high school students. The theme was the importance of modern education and the need to promote mother tongue.

A year later another fully scripted play was staged and published. Its title was *Carro Edeg* (Universe). It was another collaborative work by Maxamed Nuur "Shareeco" and Maxamed "Koofi" (Shareeco and Koofi, 1973). It was performed several nights at the National Theatre and published by the Ministry of Information as part of a book entitled *Masraxiyaddu Maxay Tahay*? (What is a Play?). It was about the sufferings of African peoples in general and their aspirations to build better developed societies.

To my knowledge the last popularly known, fully scripted play staged in Somalia was entitled *Durbaan Been ah* (False Drum) written by Maxamed Daahir Afrax / Mohamed Dahir Afrah. It was first performed on 15 May 1979 at the Mogadishu National Theatre by a well known theatre troupe called *Danan Artists*. It then went on a national tour to the central and northern regions where it was performed in the cities of Beledweyne, Gaalkacyo, Burco and Hargeysa respectively. The national tour was then discontinued by orders from the National Security Service who suspected that the play was of a dissident nature. For the same reason the play was not published in book form; the manuscript, however, is available in the possession of the author. As the title implies, the theme of this play was a critique of practices of corruption and injustice in state owned enterprises.

All these innovative initiatives fell short of striking a successful transition of post-independence Somali drama from an oral art deeply rooted in traditional oral culture to a written drama featured by fully scripted plays acted by leading performers. Orally produced plays making minimal use of writing[10] and a modern technology

10 Minimal use here means that 'most, though not all, playwrights have used some form of private

remained dominant in the Somali theatrical scene. In 1974 Andrzejewski remarked that actors 'have had no scripts from which to learn their roles and have had to memorise them from the oral delivery of the playwrights, a tedious process which has, however, in recent years been much simplified by the use of tape recorders.' (Andzejewski, 1974: 3). This has continued to be the case to date, with, perhaps, negligible exceptions.

Poetry was the main focus of those efforts in which innovators championed the modernisation of contemporary Somali literature. A group of young, educated poets and literary scholars engaged in a heated debate in the press on the need to modernise the form of Somali poetry by diverging from the use of the traditional rules of *miisaan* (metre) and *xarafraac* (alliteration). A detailed discussion of the arguments of this debate and the poets who led it is offered in chapter 4. Suffice it here to point out that the most prominent voice in this debate was that of the late poet and literary scholar, Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac 'Gaarriye' who, in his weekly literary column, *Toddobaadkan iyo Suugaanta* (Literature this Week) in the national newspaper, *Xiddigta Oktoobar*, stressed the need to free Somali poetry from the constraints of *higgaad* or *xarafraac* (alliteration) (Gaarriye, 1976). The other side of the debate was led by another poet and literary scholar, E. Cawad 'Kholi', who had taken issue with Gaarriye. His initial main point was that it is not only *xarafraac* but also *miisaan* or metre that constitutes an obstacle to the development of the new poetry; he therefore criticised Gaarriye for being against *xarafraac* while supporting the continuous use of *miisaan* by introducing its structure. (Kholi, 1976). In essence, however, Gaarriye admitted that *miisaan* too represents a problem and that a poem free from both of the traditional devices needs to be experimented with (see chapter 4). In spite of differences in certain details, such as the benefits of alliteration, the two sides of the debate agreed in the final analysis on the need for a new, modern poem, modern mainly in the sense of being free from the restrictions of the traditional alliteration and metre. It is this perspective that the use in this study of the concept 'modern poetry' draws on.

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system of writing Somali, which usually only they themsevles have been able to read, and even that very slowly. In fact they have used writing to a large extent merely as a visual aid to their oral memory.' (Andrzejewski, 1974: 3).

A second dimension is the use of the term ‘modern poetry’ to refer to the poetry produced in modern times, which is either new poetic forms which did not exist in the traditional poetry, or forms which incorporate modern features, ‘modern’ in the sense that they were not present in the traditional oral literature. One example of the first category (i.e., of the newly emerged forms) is the form referred to as ‘modern songs’ (Kapteijns, 1999, 2009) or as ‘modern poetry’ (Johnson, 1996b); and one example of the second category is contemporary poetry of the public forum (see chapter 2) with new features innovated in an adjustment to the requirements of modern times (see chapter 3). The same categorisation applies to other literary forms such as drama. Here, modern drama is represented by fully scripted plays, which did not exist in pre-independence times.

To avoid any ambiguity and for convenience in the present study the boundary between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ times or ‘modern literature’ is to me around the period coinciding the Second World War, i.e., the late 1930s and early 1940s, which happened to be a historical landmark in both the development of Somali literature and that of Somali society at large, with the inception of major historical changes in all fields of Somali life, as elucidated above. I use the term ‘traditional’ to refer to the literary forms which existed before the World War II whereas I adopt the word ‘modern’ in reference to anything that emerged since then, which extends to the present. The other literary terminology frequently used in this study include the English terms ‘genre’, ‘form’ and ‘classical’ and the Somali words, *maanso*, *hees*, *maanso-goleed*, *hees-casri* and *qaraami*. These terms and the sense in which they are used in this thesis, as well as a critical review of their use in previous literature are discussed in the next chapter.

1.6 Review of the existing literature

The subject of the present study, the transitional characteristic of post-independence Somali poetry and drama, is one that has not been considered in any known, previous scholarly work; works with direct links to the focus of this study are very scanty. Nevertheless, there are numerous works on other aspects of Somali literature or on the

broader field of Somali literature in general. I will therefore provide in this section an overview of these works with special attention to the few that can be linked to the current study.

Since the 1950s extensive efforts were made towards collecting and transcribing Somali oral literature. A considerable amount of research and documentation of this heritage has also been undertaken. All these initiatives were heightened since 1972 following the introduction of the official orthography for writing the Somali language, as mentioned earlier. Ample information about this is found in the works listed in the bibliographies to Andrzejewski, 1978; and Said, 1982. For an extensive list of more recent works on Somali poetry see the bibliography to Orwin, 2003.

The major part of the available collections and research work on Somali literature focuses on the poetry. This is not surprising given the important place of poetry in Somali life as the leading form of cultural expression in Somali traditional society. A general description of the types, functions and structures of Somali oral poetry has received most of the scholarly attention paid to Somali literature. As early as 1880 F. M. Hunter commented on various aspects of Somali traditional verse in his book, *A Grammar of the Somali language.* In another early work on the Somali language, *A Grammar of the Somali Language with examples in prose and verse and an account of the Yibir and Midgan dialects ,* J. W. Kirk collected and commented on Somali songs and oral narratives. He offers an early attempt to classify Somali songs into 'Gerar, Gabei and Hes' (Kirk, 1905: 170).

Following such early works – which also include Margaret Laurence's *A Tree for Poverty: Somali Poetry and Prose,* in which she collected and discussed a considerable amount of Somali oral literature, and E. Cerulli's *Iscrizioni e documenti arabi per la storia della Somalia* (Cerulli, 1957) who provided illuminating information about Somalis and their culture, among others. A major work published shortly after Somali independence in 1960 was B. W. Andrzejewski and I. M. Lewis's collaborative work, *Somali Poetry: An Introduction* (Andrzejewski and Lewis, 1964) which is now considered a modern classic of Somali studies. This oft-quoted work is divided into two parts. In Part One, which

serves as an elaborate introduction, the authors offer anthropological information about the Somalis and their culture. The book then moves on to the description of various aspects of Somali traditional poetry. They identify three poetic genres which they consider as 'most noble and best fitted for dealing with serious and important matters: the *gabay*, the *geeraar* and the *jiifto*' (Andrzejewski and Lewis, 1964: 47). The second part of the book is mainly devoted to the transcription and translation of a wide variety of sample poems together with short introductions. The texts collected fall under two broad categories into which Andrzejewski and Lewis divided the Somali poetry they have described. The two categories are classical poetry and songs; the latter category is sub-divided into modern and traditional songs. Again, the latter is further divided into dance and work songs (ibid: 52). The book does not include textual analysis of the poems.

Ten years later, John William Johnson published an innovative book on Somali modern songs entitled, *Heellooy Heelleellooy: The Development of the Genre Heello in Modern Somali Poetry,* reprinted in 1996 with the amended title of *"heelloy": Modern Poetry and Songs of the Somali* (Johnson, 1996b). As indicated in the title, Johnson's book focuses on the historical development of modern Somali songs which he describes as 'the main genre of modern poetry' (Johnson, 1996b: 1). He argues that this new form 'now commands the attention formerly reserved for the traditional genres, at least among the urban and elite segments of Somali society' (ibid). Johnson's study which adopts an historical approach draws on a rich collection of Somali modern songs placing them under three different periods of development. He provides brief descriptions of the historical conditions that inspired the songs of each period, as well as their respective characteristics. The texts of the songs, both in the original Somali and English translation, together with comments constitute the core of the book. Not much attention has been paid to the in-depth analysis of individual songs.

Relating the historical development of this poetic form, Johnson describes how the modern Somali song developed through a process of metamorphosis from a poetic form known as *balwo* into three different stages of *heello*. The last of these stages or 'periods' commences from 1960, the date of Somali independence, and Johnson remarks that 'most of the poetry I was able to collect is from the third period' (Johnson,

1996: 117). Here it is worth noting that the poems of this period, which Johnson refers to as 'Heello Period Three' (ibid) are called by Somalis *hees* or *heeso* in the plural form. Since the early 1960s Somalis no more used the name *heello* to describe the modern song, and that is why Andrzejewski and Lewis (1964) used the term *hees* instead to refer to the songs produced since then. Based on this, the naming of this form of Somali poetry throughout this study is divergent from that of Johnson (see below for more). Nevertheless, Johnson makes his choice understandable when he admits that 'the most serious difficulty I faced in the book was nomenclature' (xix).

Another point of more substantial divergence between the conclusions of my research and that of Johnson in this book relates to the beginnings of the metamorphosis of modern forms of Somali poetry from the traditional ones. Johnson traces these beginnings to the early 1940s with the appearance of what is known as *balwo*, sometimes spelt *belwo*, which several years later developed into *heello*, the earlier form of the current modern song. Johnson contends that '*belwo* could be considered as a cultural link between the pastoralist and the town dweller' (Johnson, 1996b: 49) and that it represents the beginning of the emergence of new forms of Somali poetry.

However, the findings of my research suggest that in this respect *balwo* was preceded by a poetic form called *qaraami*, which emerged in the mid-1930s and became popular with the young people in the northern towns of Saylac, Hargeysa and Berbera, while frowned upon by older people and religious leaders (Garabyare, 1985; Yuusuf, 1996). Although it was structured in the *gabay* metre, the *qaraami* was an innovative development of modern orientation in all other aspects. I have provided in the next chapter more detailed discussion of this poetic form in comparison with the traditional *gabay* on the one hand and the modern song on the other. Drawing on sources of Somali oral history, including interviews with elderly poets who were involved in the beginnings of the Somali modern song (ibid), I argue that the *qaraami*, and not the *balwo*, could be considered as the first innovation that provided the link between the old and the new, the link in the passage from the traditional way of composing Somali poetry to the modern one in a process of transition. I also discuss in the next chapter the point that, according to my sources and my background information as a native Somali involved in the field,

that the use of the term '*qaraami*' had extended to the naming of the first form of the Somali song also known as *heello*. There I explain that of the two names of the same poetic form, *qaraami* is more relevant in contemporary context. It is the one popularly used by Somalis to date to refer to the songs of the 1940s – 50s, whereas the other name, *heello* became an archaic word that faded into oblivion. It has been replaced by the name *hees* since the early 1960s, as mentioned above. For this reason I have proposed that it may be more relevant for future researchers to use the term *qaraami* when referring to the Somali love songs of the 1940s – 50s as it can be considered more accurate and more understandable to the younger generations of Somalis.

In spite of this seemingly important historical significance of the poetic form of *qaraami*, it has been overlooked not only in Johnson's book but in the entire literature on Somali poetry. Hence, the importance of bringing it to scholarly attention in the present study.

Since the 1970s a significant body of work on Somali literature was published. This was heightened by the introduction in 1972 of the official orthography for the Somali language. Again, most of these scholarly efforts focused on the field of poetry, with especial attention to the metrical structure of Somali verse, see for example, Gaarriye, 1976; Cabdullaahi Diiriye, 1978; Andrzejewski, 1981, 1993; Johnson, 1996a; Banti and Giannattasio, 1996; Orwin and Maxamed, 1997; Orwin, 2001. This particular aspect of Somali poetry attracted scholarly attention following the publication in the then Somali national newspaper, *Xiddigta Oktoobar,* of a series of seminal articles by a Somali poet and scholar, Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac "Gaarriye" (1976). Entitled *Miisaanka maansada* (Poetry metre), Gaarriye's articles outlined the basic rules of Somali metrics that govern some leading poetic genres, such as the *gabay* and the *jiifto,* along with a number of less prestigious genres such as the *baar-cadde* (a dance song) and *heesta kabdaha* (a work song). For extensive analyses of Gaarriye's ideas in these ground-breaking articles, enhanced by further investigation in the subject, see Orwin, 2001.

This initial discovery was followed by a similar study carried out by another Somali

scholar, Cabdullaahi Diiriye Guuleed (1978) who in the mid-1978 published, in the same newspaper, a new series of articles looking into the fundamentals of Somali metrics. Cadullaahi's approach was rather different from Gaarriye's. While Gaarriye focused on the total number and positions of vowels in a line with the short vowel as the basic unit, Cabdullaahi concerned himself with the number and patterning of the syllables and long vowels as the basis for the metricality of a line (Cabdullaahi Diiriye, 1978: 3). I will discuss this further, together with more recent contributions, in chapter 4, in my discussion of the fundamentals of Somali metrics and the development of Somali metrical studies.

Contrary to the case of the poetry, Somali drama has remained virtually a forgotten field when it comes to scholarly attention. Most of what has been written on Somali drama is short descriptions and passing comments mainly included in works focusing on other aspects of Somali literature, or in general accounts commenting on Somali literature, in addition to newspaper articles of a non-academic nature mainly published in the 1970s – 80s in the Somali national daily of the time *Xiddigta Oktoobar*. To my knowledge only one substantial study has so far been published on the subject, that is *Fan-masraxeedka Soomaalida: Raadraac Taariikheed iyo Faaqidaad Riwaayado Caan-baxay,* (Somali Drama: Historical Development and Critical Study of Popular Plays) by Maxamed Daahir Afrax, 1987. The book is made up of three parts. The first part looks into the history of Somali drama tracing the different stages of its development; the second analyses the characteristics of the Somali theatrical arts; and the third is a critical study of a number of popular plays. However, the book does not include a consideration of the transitional nature of this drama, which is what the present study is concerned with.

In 1978, B. W. Andrzejewski (1978) published a short article on 'Modern and traditional aspects of Somali drama'. The core of the article is made up of excerpts of poetic dialogues extracted from Somali plays to illustrate the use of elements from Somali oral tradition, such as alliterative verse and riddles, together with brief comments. However, the article does not examine the presence of modern aspects in Somali drama.

On the subject of traditional and modern aspects of Somali literature in general, Giorgio Banti, who has contributed many works to Somali literary studies, published in 1996 an article entitled, 'Tradizione e innovazione nella literatura orale dei Somali' (Banti, 1996). In this article Banti offers a general description of Somali oral literature: its structure, social functions and the use of traditional, structural devices, especially metrical scansion. He places special emphasis on the structures and historical developments of the under-researched, traditional, poetic genres of the *shirib* and *guurow* with the analysis of a variety of sample poems. He also discusses, albeit with less emphasis the structures of other important genres such the *gabay*, the *jiifto* and the *masafo*.

Of direct relevance to the present study is an earlier article by Andrzejewski, entitled 'The Rise of Written Somali Literature' (Andrzejewski, 1975), which I shall discuss below in more detail for its importance to this thesis. In this concise yet interesting article Andrzejewski offers an innovative categorisation of the Somali writers of the post-independence period. He classifies them into three groups: preservers, transmuters and innovators. The first is a group of devoted collectors who have endeavoured to collect and transcribe the vast heritage of Somali verbal art. The main preoccupation of these collectors was 'the preservation of the national culture from impoverishment, or ... from the threat of total extinction' (Andrzejewski, 1975: 7). He lists the names of members of this group who started their work before the adoption of the official Somali orthography in 1972, using different scripts; they include Muuse Xaaji Ismaaciil Galaal, Aw Jaamac Cumar Ciise, Shire Jaamac Axmed and Cumar Aw Nuux.

The second group, whom Andrzejewski calls 'transmuters', were not concerned with collecting oral literature for the purpose of preserving it as such; rather, their main concern lay in the use of 'texts and themes derived from oral sources as important ingredients of their works (ibid: 9). Andrzejewski identifies 'only three authors' (ibid) as falling under this category. The first is Faarax M. J. Cawl, in his novel *Aqoondarro waa u Nacab Jacayl* (Ignorance is the Enemy of Love), which is based on the true story of the two ill-fated lovers, Calimaax and Cawrala, who lived in the Sanaag area of Somalia, about the turn of the 20th century. The second and the third of the three writers are Axmed Faarax Cali "Idaajaa" and Cabdulqaadir Xirsi "Yamyam" who have co-authored a play called *Dabkuu Shiday Darwiishkii* (The Fire which the Dervish

Lit). The ‘Dervish’ in the title refers to Sayid Maxamed Cabdulle Xasan (see above). It is a history play in terms of its theme and characters. Moreover, the actual poems of Sayid Maxamed as well as those of other Dervish poets, such as Ismaaciil Mire, are inserted as verbatim throughout the play. In both these works, themes and texts from sources of oral history are derived and adapted to the needs of a modern literary form, the stage drama.

The third category is the innovator group. As is obvious from their name, this category is described by Andrzejewski as a group of writers who have ‘introduced new elements into Somali culture which were totally absent before. Their activities extend to poetry, drama and prose’ (ibid: 10). Of the stated ‘new elements’ the author identifies two: ideological commitment of new political poetry and one fully scripted play called *Samawada* by Axmed Cartan Xaange (1968).

Commenting on his own work, Andrzejewski is modest enough to admit that it ‘is only a preliminary survey and does not attempt to be exhaustive’ and that a fuller critical appraisal is ‘a task which is best left to those scholars whose mother tongue is Somali’ (ibid: 11). It is true that the article lacks a deeper analysis with more inclusive representation of the new aspects of Somali literature described and the authors involved. For instance, of the new themes of Somali poetry introduced by innovators only one is identified in the article, namely the political theme of an ideological nature. Other important, innovative themes such as the role of women in society in which post-independence poets demonstrate a feminist orientation are not mentioned. Furthermore, the discussion does not include a consideration of the implications of the new literary trends represented by the emergence of the three stated categories, viewing this as part of a broader, dynamic process of transition which characterised the Somali literature under discussion. All these understandably required further research and updating, as indicated by the author himself. Besides, one has to take into account that at the time of Andrzejewski’s research it was too early to see clearly the whole picture of the new transitional developments that were taking place in the field of Somali literature; more so in the case of a researcher whose mother tongue was not Somali, as indicated by Andrzejewski above.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Andrzejewski's categorisation was a ground-breaking innovation. It set out a general framework to operate from in the study of post-independence Somali literature. Particularly, this article is important for the current study. My hypothesis that the post-independence Somali literature represented by the poetry and the drama is in a state of transition proceeds from and further develops Andrzejewski's assumption expressed in this categorisation. Despite the fact that Andrzejewski only observed and described these three categories of Somali literary creators without engaging in a deeper analysis of their implications, the emergence of the categories he described clearly indicates that the post-independence Somali literature focused on by Andrzejewski is in a state of transition and this transitional status is manifest in the two leading forms of poetry and drama, along with the prose fiction. Although Andrzejewski has not used the term 'transition' the concept of 'transmuting' he has used can be conceived as another word for 'transition'. The writers described by Andrzejewski as 'transmuters' are those I deal with as 'transitionals'. The fact that 'they transmute what belonged to the oral literature and adapt it to the new needs of written literature' (Andrzejewski, 1978: 9) means that the literature they produce is located in a transitional passage between the oral tradition they are transmuting from and a modern, written literature they are attempting to introduce. This is an illustration of the concept 'transition' as perceived in this study. Even those writers placed under Andrzejewski's 'innovators' group can be considered as transitionals as well. Despite their introduction of 'new elements' they are yet to turn away totally from oral tradition; they keep with the techniques and transmission methods of traditional oral culture. Clear evidence is found in the work of the poets whom Andzejewski cited as examples of the innovator group. While they introduce themes new to Somali poetry they rely on the oral medium to transmit their new poetry, as Andrzejewski points out when he states that 'the new poetry is presented in oral form' (ibid: 10). Continuum to oral tradition is observed even in the works of innovator novelists, a field supposed to be furthest from orality. This is clearly illustrated in the novel, *Aqoondarro waa u Nacab Jacayl,* cited by Andrzejewski (on which more below).

This indicates that Andrzejewski's 'innovators' can safely be seen as transitionals as well. While they are 'innovators' in the sense that they 'have introduced new elements

into Somali culture which were totally absent before' (ibid: 10), they are transitionals in the sense that they continue to rely on traditional tools in their treatment of the new elements they have introduced, whether new themes or new literary forms. One of the examples cited by Andrzejewski as an innovative poetry is Cabdi Muxumed Amiin's *Geeddiga Wadaay* ('Lead the Trek!'). Although this poem is innovative (i.e. new) in its content it is dependent on oral tradition not only in terms of transmission but also of imagery. To present his political ideas more powerfully the poet utilises an image derived from the pastoralist lifestyle; he employs the image of a *geeddi* or trek 'which the nomad pastoralists undertake in search of new grazing' (Andrzejewski, 1978: 10).[11]

The same applies to the works of prose fiction cited by Andrzejewski as examples of the innovations. Faarax M. J. Cawl's novel, *Aqoondarro waa u nacab jacayl*, which Andrzejewski has given special attention, can be seen as a perfect representation of literature in transition. It is made up of three components in one: history, oral narrative and prose fiction. The plot 'is based on a true story preserved in oral traditions and concerns the ill-starred love of Calimaax and Cawrala, who lived and died in the early part of this [20th] century in the Sanaag region of Somalia' (ibid: 9).
The style of presentation derives from that of traditional oral narratives; the influence of the traditional style is evident, among other things, in that the novel is interspersed with poems, some of them taken verbatim from oral tradition while others are composed by the author. On the other hand, an element of imaginary prose fiction influenced by the modern fiction writing is clearly present. The writer's presentation of the blend of these three elements in such a harmonious manner is interesting and it clearly displays a characteristic of a transitional work of literature.

Added to the above argument is that the very existence of Andrzejewski's three categories of post-independence Somali writers in such an inter-relating sequence indicates a dynamic process of a literature in transition from the past represented by the 'preservers' to the future experimented by the 'innovators' through the present represented by the 'transmuters'. It is this seemingly important aspect of Somali literature, which has not been considered in any previous research, that the present

11 See the preceding section for further description.

study attempts to examine, bring out and contribute to the knowledge in this field.

A recent work of particular relevance to the current study, at least partially, is a paper by Lidwien Kapteijns with the title of 'Discourse on Moral Womanhood in Somali Popular Songs, 1960 – 1990' (Kapteijns, 2009), referred to in the preceding section. Although this paper focuses on gender relations and women's role in post-independence Somalia seen through the popular songs of the period, it is partly linked to this study, as the author discusses several points pertinent to the focus of my thesis, as we shall see shortly. The paper follows on from an earlier work by the author; a book entitled *Women's Voices in a Man's World: Women and the Pastoral Tradition in Northern Somali Orature* (Kapteijns with Maryan, 1999). The texts of and comments on a large collection of Somali modern songs sung by women constitute the core of the book. Of the two works by Kapteijns the more recent paper is more relevant to the focus of my study; therefore I shall pay special attention to the review of this work.

In this paper Kapteijns looks into the issue of moral womanhood through the discussion of Somali popular songs in the context of the socio-economic and political changes which took place in Somalia in the stated period, as well as in relation to the concepts of 'tradition', 'modernity' and reshaped communal identity as perceived by the Somali elite of the period, including artists and song writers. Given the fact that popular songs constitute major components of both the poetry and the drama focused on in the present thesis, many of the points raised by Kapteijns on the popular songs are also applicable to both the post-independence poetry (represented by the songs as part of it) and the plays. These points include that the songs reflected 'the desire [of the Somalis] to be *modern*, while at the same time turning to *tradition*' (Kapteijns, 2009: 101). It is worth noting that all the songs presented in Kapteijns' paper, except for one, were part of plays; as Kapteijns remarks, 'Songs both marked the major episodes of the plot and articulated the underlying political, social or philosophical themes of these plays' (p. 106). Indeed several of these plays are referred to or discussed in the current study in chapters 5 and 6. Two of the songs (see below) come from the play *Shabeelnaagood*, the

subject of chapter 6.

In this article Kapteijns analyses a number of Somali popular songs, six in number, presenting the full texts of both the original Somali and English translation. She uses these songs as source materials to examine the issue of moral womanhood in post-independence Somalia in the context of changing communal identity. She offers a discussion of the Somali nation-building project which began during and following the Second World War and culminated in the establishment of an independent Somali state in 1960. She also discusses the collapse of this state in the early 1990s and the violent conflict that followed. The article examines the reflections of all these in the popular songs with special focus on the role of women and gender relations.

Kapteijns argues that the Somali popular songs of the three decades following independence reflect the dilemma of the Somali state-building project, 'namely the desire to be "modern", while at the same time turning to "tradition" (i.e. a particular construction of Somali cultural authenticity and traditional religious morality) to mark and anchor a new Somali collective self-understanding and communal identity' (ibid: 101). She also asserts that Somalis of the time represented by poets and songwriters expressed in the songs their views about moral womanhood which means what a 'good' women should be like. Later in the paper she discusses the failure of the Somali nationalist project which aimed to build a modern Somali state. This failure expressed itself most dramatically in the breakout of 'violence incited by power-hungry warlords masquerading as national leaders' (ibid: 118).

In her discussion of the gender issue as presented in the songs, Kapteijns underscores the contradictory views pertaining to the position of women in the new Somali society held by both the poets and the wider society. On the one hand, the general tendency of the poets and the Somali elite they represented was in favour of gender equality and women's emancipation; on the other hand, however, Kapteijns contends that composers of the popular songs 'powerfully articulated' (p. 113) a conservative view against women's freedom, which implies that such a conservative tendency appeared stronger in the raging debate on 'tradition' versus 'modernity'.

Here, one of the examples referred to by Kapteijns is a song in which a man and a woman debate gender issues. The man expresses conservative views by attributing 'the decay of marriage to women's modern and indecent dress and non-traditional social freedom' (p. 111), while the woman 'asserts the rights and freedoms of all women and blames the problem on men's abusive treatment of women' (p. 112).

It is true that the view expressed in the words of the male singer above and similar ones cited in the article appears to be against women's freedom. However, this should not make us conclude that the song writer or Somali poets of the time favoured such a view. Conversely, the play (*Shabeelnaagood*) where the song in question comes from is considered as 'pro-feminist' (Andrzejewski, 1974: vi), as also is considered its playwright, Xasan Shiikh Muumin, the composer of this song (see chapter 6). As we shall see in our discussion of *Shabeelnaagood*, Somali playwrights and song writers tend to create a poetic debate between male and female characters to display the gender arguments in which each of the sexes blame the other for what has gone wrong. This particular song, entitled *Xaq Miyaa* (Is this Justice?), is a typical example. One can presume that the intended purposes of the composer were to represent this kind of gender-based argument as it happens in real life and to set the stage for the response of the woman through which he champions women's rights. That is what most Somali playwrights tend to do when composing songs dealing with this theme, which often express the central ideas in a play. In fact the playwright lets the female singer gain the upper hand over the man in this particular song; this becomes obvious from the context in which it occurs in the play and from a close look into the wording of the song itself.

While this paper constitutes an important contribution to the study of the subject, some of its arguments could be debatable, as indicated in the preceding paragraph. Among other things, Kapteijns offers an astute discussion of the hurdles experienced by the modern-oriented nation-building project pursued by the Somali political and cultural elite of the period leading up to and following independence. The author discusses the rise and fall of the vision shaped by the said elite who attempted to draw on the potentials of the past to mobilise Somalis for a modern future. Further, she emphasises how a modern-oriented thinking led to a change in the way post-independence Somalis view gender issues and the position of women in society and

this change is reflected in the popular songs of the post-independence period. However, the paper does not include a consideration to link this to the broader changes of a transitional nature taking place in Somali literature represented by the poetry and drama.

The analysis has not gone far enough to link this to the obstructing contradictions which characterised the Somali society of the time, a society in a testing period of transition, as described in the preceding section. The challenges of the transition appear to have overweighed and obstructed the opportunities for success in modern nation-building. The reflections of such a challenging transition on the literature of the stated period is what needs to be investigated and this is what the present study attempts to do.

Both Kapteijns in the above paper and Andrzejewski (1975) above observed the emergence of new trends in Somali literary practice of the post-independence period. However, they did not go far enough in discussing the extent and underlying nature of these changes as well as their implications in the context of a literature in a period of transition; this is understandable as such an extended discussion was obviously beyond the intended scope of these two works. What Andrzejewski was concerned with was to provide a description of the three groupings of writers he observed; on the other hand the main focus of the paper by Kapteijns was the discussion of the issue of moral womanhood seen through the popular songs of the period in question.

It is the purpose of the present study to cover this issue. Building on the previous work on other aspects of Somali literature, this study seeks to examine, for the first time, the main characteristics of post-independence Somali poetry and drama as literature in transition, a characteristic feature given to this literature by the historical, political and social changes of transitional character in the Somalia of the period leading up to and following independence. As far as the present study is concerned this period extends to the present, given the fact that the fundamental characteristics of post-independence Somali poetry and drama under discussion

have remained more or less the same to date.[12]

1.7 Methodology

In this section I shall describe the methods I used to acquire the information and source materials required to achieve the objectives of the study presented earlier in this chapter. This study mostly draws on original source materials of Somali poetry and plays in the Somali language. This is perhaps inevitable since the secondary literature remains very small and the research must draw on primary sources scattered over different countries. The study also draws on information acquired from the author's personal involvement for many years as both practitioner and researcher in Somali literature (see below).

The most serious challenge, faced with the work of data collection, was the vast scatteredness of sources and the lack of access to Somalia, especially to the capital Mogadishu, the central location of data on the subject of this study, due to security problems. As the capital and the main urban centre of Somalia, Mogadishu used to be the centre and the main location of most of the literary activities discussed in this study. However, as mentioned earlier, Somalia has suffered from a long-running civil war which destroyed almost everything over the past two decades and Mogadishu has remained the most dangerous and most devastated city in the country. Added to this is the destruction of most of the resource centres, such as the National Theatre, the National Library and all museums. Most members of art and literature groups and societies, including poets and dramatists had to flee the war and disperse all over the globe in search of safety.

Faced with such a challenge, I set out a plan to start the collection of source materials in London where I have been based. The main target was primary sources of Somali poetry and drama, with special attention to materials produced in the post-independence period. One factor which helped reduce the difficulties was that, as the result of the influx of Somalis seeking refuge in the UK, London has become in recent years home to a remarkable number of people who actively participated in the

12 Further review of more literature is included in the next chapter where it is more pertinent.

literary practice focused on in this study; these include poets, dramatists, collectors and oral historians. Moreover, members of the growing Somali community in the UK opened music shops in different parts of London and UK, with good collections of audio-visual materials, including poems and plays produced and recorded over the past four decades, some of them even beyond. Added to this is the availability in London of written sources of Somali literature as part of the holdings of the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). These include a collection of rare materials, including manuscripts and audio recordings, preserved by the late Professor Andrzejewski, classified as the Andrzejewski Collection (AC). Furthermore, a significant number of secondary sources are available at the SOAS Library.

All of the above encouraged me to start my research in London. Given that the aim of this study is to discern the transitional characteristics in post-independence Somali poetry and drama, by examining the main features of these two literary forms, it was imperative to focus on the examination of textual sources and also to consult extra-textual sources for more information and explanation. By textual sources I mean the actual texts of Somali poetry and drama, whether written or tape recorded, while extra-textual sources are information and analytical and critical comments and validations from those involved in the literary practice in question. The use of secondary sources, where relevant, was also part of the research plan.

The next step in the plan was to pay research visits, whenever possible, to the Republic of Djibouti, a Somali-speaking country where Somali poetry and drama are actively practiced and documented. Later, as the Director of the Somali-speaking PEN and editor of HALABUUR Journal of Somali Literature and Culture, both of which are based in Djibouti, I had the opportunity to stay in Djibouti for considerable blocks of time over the past years. This gave me an opportunity to gain access to important source materials; both textual and extra-textual (see below). Furthermore, I had the opportunity to access and collect materials from resource centres in Djibouti, such as the sound library of the Djibouti Radio and Television (RTD) as well as an abundance of Somali music shops who store a rich collection of Somali poetry and plays on tape or CDs and DVDs.

The principal research methods used in this study were the investigation of textual sources, interviews, sometimes formal or semi-structured but mostly non-formal (to encourage more feedback), archival research and open-ended conversations with informed participants. Tools such as tape recording, note taking and material collecting were used. In cases where recording-shy respondents were interviewed, post-interview summaries, later co-validated by the interviewees, were devised.

The nature of the focus of this study, i.e., the exploration of the nature of the post-independence Somali poetry and drama, makes it imperative to place especial emphasis on the research method of examining source texts, i.e., the examination of actual works of Somali poetry and drama. Therefore I had to engage in the collection of hundreds of Somali poems, plays and songs from the resource centres and music shops mentioned above. The research has also benefitted from my own existing collection of similar materials. Some of the said materials are contained in published sources while most are recorded on audio-visual tapes or on CDs and DVDs. This is understandable given that the bulk of Somali literature is predominantly of oral nature. The fact that I was already familiar with many of these works and with their contextual background facilitated my grasp of them and made the research work easier. Similarly, my acquaintance and close personal links with the majority of the significant practitioners of Somali poetry and drama, both in Somalia and Djibouti, facilitated the carrying out of the extra-textual examination. Here, a brief note giving a picture of my previous links and involvement in the field and how this has benefitted the research work may be useful.

I lived, studied and worked in the Somali capital, Mogadishu, for most of my adult life in Somalia, that is from the early 1960s – 80s, the period in which most of the bulk of Somali literary output discussed in this thesis was produced. And, as mentioned earlier, Mogadishu had been the centre of Somali literary activities in the said period. From an early age I used to be an art lover and regular theatre-goer, keen not to miss a play. This led me to start writing and publishing commentaries on the plays I viewed and, later, to write plays myself (e.g., Maxamed Daahir, 1979). From the mid-1970s – early 1980s I had acted as a literary critic who extensively

published, mainly in the Somali press, a long series of articles and literary commentaries on Somali plays and poems as they appeared, aside from my main literary work as a novelist and playwright (see for example, Maxamed, 1979, 1981, 1985). For significant examples of these works, see Maxamed, 1987, pp. 172 - 296. This experience led to the undertaking of a more substantial research project on Somali drama carried out from 1984 – 1987, the result of which was what became the first scholarly book on the subject (Maxamed, 1987), entitled *Fan-masraxeedka Soomaalida* (see above). In addition, my work as a director at the Somali National Theatre, from 1979 – 80, and as director of the Department of Arts and Sport at the Somali Youth Union from 1977 - 79, with responsibility for performing artists, gave me an opportunity to maintain close links with Somali literary and artistic activities as well as with the practitioners involved.

Outside Somalia, during the period of crisis in Somalia, I have continued, over the last two decades, to be actively involved in Somali literary activities. From 1993 to the present I have served as founder-editor of *HALABUUR, International Journal of Somali Literature and Culture* which is in part a learned journal and in part a literary magazine. The co-ordination of the work of *HALABUUR* offered me the opportunity to establish close links with a remarkable number of Somali writers who have been interested in submitting contributions. Some of these writers benefitted the present study as research respondents.

A similar opportunity was offered by my involvement in the work of the Somali-speaking Centre of International PEN (SSPEN) as a founder-President since 1996 – 2010. SSPEN, which I set up in London back in 1996, is considered the biggest perhaps the only significant association of Somali writers; its membership includes a large network of Somali and Somali-speaking writers, poets, playwrights and oral composers living in different countries. SSPEN or Somali PEN, as often referred to by Somalis, actively operates in different countries including Somalia, Djibouti and the UK and its name is well known to Somalis everywhere. What is relevant to our discussion here is that, as leader of this association, I had either organised or participated in numerous literary conferences, seminars and cultural festivals held mainly in Djibouti, but also in Somalia and the UK. Examples are *The Somali*

Cultural Community Week (SCCW), 24 June – 2 July, 2003; *Somali Language and Literature Week*, 21 – 27 February, 2006; *Somali-Speaking PEN Conference*, 20 – 25 November, 2010. All of these events were held in Djibouti and I was involved as an organiser-participant. Details of similar events held in Somalia, UK and elsewhere would be too involved in this discussion. Suffice it to say that my involvement and participation in these gatherings, which brought together from around the world hundreds of Somalis actively involved in Somali literature past and present resulted in different ways in my acquisition of resource materials very useful to this research.

At times I was able to purposefully organise, as part of one of these events, panel discussions focusing on issues relevant to my research. For instance, as part of the *Mother Tongue Week* in Djibouti in 2006, which included a number of panels on selected topics on the Somali language and literature, I was able to include a panel relevant to both the theme of the festival and the subject of my research. Held on 23 February, 2006, the panel, which was conducted in the Somali language, focused on the topic of *If-baxyada cusub ee maansaynta Soomaalida* (The new trends in Somali versification). It was chaired by Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac "Gaarriye", a leading Somali poet and literary scholar, and the panelists included the prominent Somali poet-playwrights, Cali Sugulle, Cabdi Muxumed Amiin, Cabdulqaadir Cabdi "Shube" and Xasan Cilmi Diiriye. The panel which attracted a large number of people who actively participated in the discussion[13] resulted in insightful conclusions which either validated, corrected or enriched my arguments in chapters 3 and 4 of this study. This is one example of instances where the methodology applied in the present study is divergent in some aspects from some conventional methods used in disciplines of more technical nature or in cases of researchers with better access to more systematic sources of data. Another rare opportunity offered by these conferences and similar literary meetings was that they gave me the chance to take the opportunity of the presence of resourceful literary personalities, gathered from around the world, to get hold of them, conduct interviews and conversations with them outside the meeting times.

13 See *Warbixintii Toddobaadka Afka Hooyo* (Report of the Mother Tongue Week), Somali-speaking PEN, Djibouti: April, 2006.

Alongside these literary activities I have continued over the past two decades researching and writing on various aspects of Somali literature; for instance, see Maxamed, 1990, 1994, 1999, 2007a, 2007b, 2010. Thus, the present study rests on and follows from such a life-long, personal involvement in the field, benefitting from the materials already collected, the knowledge gained and the links established with the active practitioners of Somali literature. My close familiarity with Somali literature and literary life as well as my regular contacts in many ways with Somali poets, dramatists and other members of the Somali literary community provided an important foundation for this research.

Aside from capturing opportunities such as the above, I engaged in a better planned and more focused work of data collection. Both in London and Djibouti a list of target interviewees was established. Interview questions were set out and the selected interviewees were approached one by one in a scheduled manner. Most of the targeted respondents collaborated with me and I was able to acquire an abundance of information and comments from poets, playwrights, actors, singers, former arts administrators in Somalia, literature teachers and others. A central research method applied in this study was documentation. This was initially done through collecting information and materials from libraries such as SOAS Library, the sound library of the Radio and Television of Djibouti and the sound archives of Radio Hargeysa in Somalia. A substantial amount of source materials was also collected from music shops and booksellers in London, Djibouti, Hargeysa, Stockholm and Nairobi. Apart from the poems and the plays found on audio-visual recordings, a significant number of published collections of poetry and plays were acquired from book shops and publishers such as Scansom publishers in Stockholm. These materials have been crucially important as they provided me with the textual source materials which this study largely draws on; these have been the sources that enabled me to explore the inmost nature of post-independence Somali poetry and drama, discerning their transitional characteristics. As a next step after the collection process I engaged in the selection and the study of the collected materials. I examined around 300 sample poems including modern songs, the majority of which belong to the post-independence period. In the songs sampling, *qaraami* poems and lyrics were included, some of them dating back to the 1930s, these are samples from

the early *qaraami gabay*s by *Kabacad* poets.[14]

To make sure that the samples chosen are rightly representative, I paid special attention to the best known poems, to the best of my knowledge, with the assumption that they became popular for their aesthetic as well as thematic qualities. For the same reason, I was keen to include as many poems by leading poets as possible; I thus included well known poems by such leading poets as Maxamed Ibraahim Warsame "Hadraawi", Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac "Gaarriye", Abshir Nuur Faarax "Bacadle", Cabdulqaadir Cabdi Yuusuf "Shube", Xasan Shiikh Muumin and others. I also included a significant number of poems, mostly popular songs, composed by younger, less well known poets but sung by well known singers such as Nimco Yaasiin, Maxamed Xasan "Lafoole", Sahra Halgan and others. I thoroughly examined the bulk of sample poems in terms of both form and content.
Guided by the focus and objectives of this study, I placed special emphasis on aspects of form, aspects such as structure and techniques, with a view to detect the use of devices such as alliteration, metre, melodic chant, poetic introduction and poetic boasting; I examined these aspects in comparison to traditional poetry with the aim to explore the new trends and innovations that have emerged in the post-independence period.

A similar procedure was applied in the collection, selection and examination of the sample plays. Around 25 representative plays were selected on the basis of their popularity and date of production. The examination of the plays focused on the themes, techniques, characterisation and methods of production and transmission, with a view to detect the presence of mixed influences of tradition and modernity and to determine whether this displays evidence that post-independence Somali drama is in a state of transition.

The results of the thorough examination of the textual sources were then cross-checked with and complemented by those of three other sources: the extra-textual examination (i.e., interviews, conversations etc.), secondary sources (see in-text

14 For details see chapter 2.

references throughout the thesis) and the background knowledge of the author. This was followed by extensive analysis of the results. The overall findings have demonstrated evidence supporting the initial research hypothesis that post-independence Somali poetry and drama are in a state of transition and that they seem to be representing the experience of a society in transition.

1.8. Summary

This chapter has introduced the study placing it in the context of the historical, political and social conditions that prevailed in Somalia in a period of transition. In this chapter I have presented the focus and the objectives of the study. I have touched upon its importance and the new contributions it may make to knowledge in this field. This will be further discussed in the concluding chapter. The literature review section establishes that the subject of this study has never been considered in previous scholarly works. Definitions of main concepts used in the study are offered in this chapter; these include the terms ‘transition’, ‘modern, ‘traditional’ and ‘contemporary’. The research methods used and their relevance to the aim of the study are also discussed.

CHAPTER 2

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED IN THE CATEGORISATION AND NAMING OF SOMALI POETRY

2.1 Introduction

In an interesting introduction to their collaborative work on African literatures including Somali, professors Andrzejewski, Pilaszewicz and Tyloch (1985: 22) state that

> The classification and naming of types of literary composition is another area which it is illuminating to study. In the surveys represented here the majority of the systems of genre division are products of oral cultures which had no literary scholarship in any written form. No common underlying system between the cultures has so far been observed, but what is common is the fact that each genre plays its own social role and has its position in the hierarchy of values of each community. The great variety of genres, as well as the lack of correspondence between them and the genre names used in such languages as English or French creates problems of translation and lays bare the inadequacy of the traditional European genre classifications, which are more a product of historical development than of scientific thought.

The case of classification and naming of Somali literary forms in general and poetic types in particular attests to this informed assertion. If the issue of classifying African literature and art is agreed to be far from settled (see, for instance, Ogumbiyi, 1982; Etherton, 1982) the Somali case is an obvious example. Here, 'the lack of correspondence' between indigenous literary terms and the genre names used in the English language is just one, albeit perhaps the biggest, of several problems encountered by translators and researchers. The hard choice between a legion of subtle Somali literary names is yet another problem. This puzzling situation presents students of Somali literature with a real dilemma, something John Johnson refers to as 'the biggest problem in my research' (Johnson, 1996b: 91n).[15]

15 It must be noted that it is not only non-Somali researchers that face this problem. As an

That is why it is important here to pinpoint some key terms and consider their use in previous scholarly works on Somali literature on the one hand and their proposed use in the present study on the other. Such terms include 'genre', 'form', 'classical' and 'miniature genres' in English and '*maanso*', '*heello*' and '*hees*' in Somali. This chapter attempts to achieve several goals. The first is to avoid possible ambiguity in my use of terminology in the thesis, particularly in the following two chapters on Somali poetry where the said terms will be used extensively. My description and use of some of the terms may be innovative and not analogous to the way they have been described previously or used in scholarly works in the past. The second purpose is to shed more light on these terms and offer a critical review of the way in which they have been used hitherto with a view to contribute to the consolidation and deeper understanding of the terminology pertaining to Somali literary studies. The third purpose is to present, towards the end of the chapter, ideas and evidence supporting my argument that the Somali modern song, *hees-casri*, is in a state of transition as are the other two leading forms of Somali post-independence literature, namely the public forum poetry and the drama, the main focus of my thesis.

Finally, the discussion in the chapter is motivated by the hope that this contribution may inspire further research which may lead to a satisfactory settlement of the problem with the terminology used in Somali literary studies in general and the categorisation and naming of Somali poetry types in particular.

2.2 'Genre' and 'form'

The two words 'genre' and 'form' are just two examples of many terms frequently used in Somali literary studies which elude clear-cut definition. On many occasions they are used differently by different scholars or in different contexts, as we shall

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indigenous Somali speaker, I myself had experienced frustrating difficulties with nomenclature when I was working on a book on Somali theatre (Maxamed, 1987) in Somali. This is not surprising if one considers what Yaasiin calls: 'xasilid la'aanta Af-Soomaaliga' (the volatility of the Somali language) (Yaasiin, 1976: xv). There was no official writing system for Somali before 1972 and the issue of establishing a fixed Somali modern terminology is far from settled.

see below. In this study I use the first term 'genre' primarily to refer to an established type of poetic composition defined by its specific metrical arrangements and rhythmic patterns. Another aspect which defines a type of poem as part of a particular genre is the *luuq*, the melodic chant to which poetry was traditionally recited. I will discuss this in detail in chapter 3. Examples of genres in this context are the *gabay*, (the lead genre of Somali traditional poetry), the *buraanbur* (the principal genre of Somali women's poetry) and the *shubaal* (the most common traditional work song).

As we shall see later in this chapter and the following one, Somali verse may be divided into the two broad, content-based categories of 'serious' and 'light' poetry. The best known genres which fall under the first category are five: the *gabay*, the *geeraar*, the *jiifto*, the *buraanbu*r, and the *masafo*. See Andrzejewski and Lewis, 1964 for samples of each. Of the 'light' category, *dhaanto*, *saar* and *shubaal* are among the most popular genres. In this description we will concentrate here on the *dhaanto* and the *saar* for their particular relevance to the present discussion. Given below are brief examples showing what these two sample genres are like:

A: *dhaanto*

Xertuu wadey Xaaji Baalbaal iyo
Xaliimo xariirtii baa timid.
The followers of Xaaji Baalbaal[16]
O Xaliimo, the nice guys have arrived!

These are two typical *dhaanto* lines when sung to the distinct melodic chant of the

16 Xaaji Baalbaal, or Diiriye Baalbaal, as he was better known, was a very famous *dhaanto* dancer and gifted composer who had so many followers and fans among the youths of his time. He is said to be the one who in the early 1940s took the art of *dhaanto* from the countryside to the city in what was the British Protectorate of Somaliland. In the towns of Hargeysa, Berbera and Ceerigaabo he became a legendary name among the youth from both sexes who flocked to join his endless *dhaanto* performances (Cumar Dhuule, field notes, Addis Ababa, 4 June 1996). This is what is reflected in this anonymous *dhaanto* couplet (apparently by a young lady addressing her female friend by the name of Xaliimo). According to Cabdillaahi Qarshi (tape recording, 16 February 1995) and others, the rise of modern Somali song in the north was mainly inspired by the urban rehabilitation of the *dhaanto* movement led by Diiriye Baalbaal. One of the strong pieces of evidence which supports this contention is the exclusive use of the *dhaanto* metrical pattern in the new song, first *balwo* then *heello* or *qaraami*. Another resemblance of *dhaanto* in the new genres is the couplet stanza format which they all share.

genre. *Dhaanto* is one of the most popular traditional dance songs.[17] Like the two genres of *gabay* and *guurow*, which share the same metre, the *dhaanto* shares the same metrical scansion with its sister genres, often referred to as the *wiglo* family. Other members in this family are *wiglo*, *hirwo*, *balwo* and *heello.* The latter two had flourished in the period from the early 1940s to the late 1950s, while *wiglo, hirwo* and *dhaanto* belong to the long established Somali folklore. All these light genres can only be distinguished by their respective melodic tunes (*luuq*) to which they are sung; for instance, the two lines cited above cannot be identified as to which of the above genres they come from unless and until they are sung to a specific *luuq*. This poses a bit of a problem for the genre classification based solely on metrical arrangements. I will elaborate on this in chapter 3 in my description of the feature *luuq*.

B: *Saar*[18]

The second sample genre, namely the s*aar* is another dance song which was originally associated with the spirit possession cult of the same name. As an art form, however, it is one of the well-known entertainment verses traditionally sung in the evening by young pastoralists with the accompaniment of drumming and dance. Like the *dhaanto*, it too has three sister genres sharing the same metre: the *baarcadde*, the *guux* and the *durbaan,* sometimes called *haan.* The three different genres are practised in different parts of the Somali-speaking territories (from Kismaayo to Djibouti and from Gaalkacyo to Jigjiga), but they share many characteristics including *miisaan* or metre.

The lines below come from a *saar* verse composed by the late poet Carays Ciise Kaarshe who died on 6 August 1972; he was the best ever known *saar* composer, the man who pioneered the use of the genre to deal with complex issues of public

17 By 'dance songs' I mean those light verses sung at traditional dance performances.

18 The *miisaan* or metrical scansion of the *saar* is also shared by the *saar* family which comprises the *baarcadde*, the *guux* and the *haan*/*durbaan*, all of which are different dance songs (*hees-ciyaareed*) practised in different Somali regions. As is the case with the *wiglo* family above, the stated four genres in the *saar* group could only be distinct from one another when the verse in question is performed verbally and sung to one of the familiar melodies associated with either of these genres.

concern in modern Somalia. The second important innovation pioneered by Carays was the presentation of poetry using the *saar* metre not as part of a dance event performed in the evening for youth entertainment but as separate poetry of the public forum presented anytime in an urban environment, often through radio broadcast or through the cassette player:

> *Af goortuu xaalku yahay*
> *Itaalkay baan ordaa*
> *Irdaha waan kala aqaan*
> . . . .
> *Intii alif saar taqaan*
> *Anay igu aamineen*
> (Carays cited in Cabdirashiid, 1999: 23)

> When it comes to oratory
> I do my best
> I know my way
> . . . . . .
> All those who know the A-Z of the *saar*
> Have endorsed my leading position.[19]

One important aspect in which the two examples of *dhaanto* and *saar* cited above are distinct from each other is the line length, which is defined by the number of units of duration (morae), arranged in accordance with the rules particularly used in each genre as part of the well-established metrical system called in Somali *miisaan,* literally meaning balance. *Miisaan* or metre is one of the two major structural features that regulate Somali versification, the other one being *xarafraac* or alliteration. The two features are the theme of chapter 4. In addition, for more information about *miisaan* and *xarafraac* see Gaarriye, 1976; Cabdullaahi, 1978; Andrzejewski, 1981, 1993; Johnson, 1996b; Banti and Giannattasio, 1996; Orwin and Maxamed, 1997; Orwin, 2001. Suffice it here to point out that, as we see from the two verses at the beginning of this section, a line in a *dhaanto* verse contains 12-14 units of duration (Cabdullaahi, 1978, 4/164, p. 3), each represented by a short vowel or diphthong (a long vowel counts as two short ones). A *saar* line, on the other hand, has ten morae, except for some rare cases where it

19 For the full text of this poem and further information about the life and work of Carys Ciise, see Cabdirashiid, 1999.

may be one unit more or one unit less (Banti and Giannattasio, 1996).

Returning to the first category of Somali poetry, namely the 'serious' genres, or the *maanso-goleed*, as we shall call it later, the first three genres in the above list are described with ample illustrations in Andrzejewski and Lewis 1964. Furthermore, certain genres of particular relevance to this study, such as the *gabay* and the *jiifto* will be dealt with in detail in the chapter that follows.

One more genre which has been described in Andrzejewski and Lewis (1964: 48) is the *masafo,* although they have referred to it as '*jiifto*', probably because they have been informed by indigenous oral sources reflecting a confusion that still exists among many Somalis who tend to confuse between the two inter-related[20] genres (Banti and Giannattasio, 1996). I will shed more light on this problem in the next chapter as part of our discussion of the *jiifto*[21] and its increasing pre-eminence in recent decades.

In light of what has been discussed in the preceding pages, I will use the term 'genre' in the present thesis to refer to a particular type of poetic composition in the sense elucidated above. To avoid confusion, I shall attempt not to use the term in the broader sense of the word as suggested by the definition given in *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* 1998) according to which it refers to any 'category of artistic composition ... characterised by similarities in form, style or subject matter.' Examples of this are the novel, the drama and the poetry.

Nevertheless, as far as this thesis is concerned, I shall use the term 'form' or 'literary form' in most part to refer to these classes of literary composition elsewhere in

20 A *jiifto* couplet or two *jiifto* lines make up the two parts of one *masafo* line known in Somali as *hojis* and *hooris*.

21 Because of the prevailing big confusion between the *masafo* and the *jiifto*, the latter has repeatedly and incorrectly been described in some scholarly works on Somali poetry as being one of the main genres of the classical or serious poetry. In fact, as a traditional poetic genre, *jiifto* belonged to the 'light' category. While comprehensive study of the subject is yet to be undertaken, initial observation suggests that the genre was mainly used in structuring certain improvised songs which accompanied dance performances. It is only in modern times that the *jiifto* has rapidly taken over the task of dealing with serious matters, thus superseding the *gabay*, an interesting development that will be elucidated in chapter 4.

Somali literary studies referred to as ‘genres’. I may also use the word ‘form’ sometimes in reference to a sub-division thereof, such as traditional or contemporary form of drama. In other instances, I apply the term ‘form’ for its conventional, artistic usage, meaning the structural and aesthetic side of a creative work, as opposed to ‘content’; that is the particular way in which the parts of a work of art are constructed or put together and the various elements employed for this purpose. Needless to say the different applications of these terms will be apparent from the different contexts in which they occur.

2.3 ‘Classical’ and ‘miniature’ genres

The two terms above have been used by scholars to classify Somali poetry into two categories, the first of which is referred to as ‘classical’ and the second as ‘miniature genres’ (Andrzejewski, 1967, 1981; Johnson, 1972, 1996a; Mohamed Abdillahi, 1989). The latter category is also less frequently referred to as the ‘light genres’ (Andrzejewski, 1967: 5). The word ‘classical’ is used in scholarly writings to refer to those genres of Somali oral poetry which tackle serious matters, i.e. matters of social, political or philosophical nature (Andrzejewski and Lewis, 1964; Andrzejewski, 1981; Axmed, 1993). In this context there is not much controversy over the use of the term ‘classical’, unlike the second term ‘miniature genres’ which is debatable.

The latter has been used, as opposed to ‘classical’, to describe a different grouping of Somali oral poetry, one which is often smaller in size and less serious in content. Generally speaking, this kind of poetry is entertainment-oriented, whether individual or group amusement. What is left ambiguous, however, is the range of specific genres that come under this category. The term has been used by different scholars in different contexts or for different groupings of genres. According to John Johnson, only four related genres belong to what he calls ‘the family of miniature genres’:

> The *wiglo*, the *dhaanto*, the *hirwo* and the *balwo* are the four genres

> that make up the family of miniature genres. The names of these genres and the classifications of specific poems in a particular genre are Somali. The grouping of the four into one family, however, is my own innovation
> (Johnson 1996: 27)

Thus, while Johnson limits the membership of this family to those four genres which relate to each other, chiefly by their common metrical structure, other researchers (Andrzejewski, 1981 and Mohamed Abdillahi, 1989) use the same term 'miniature genres' in a broader sense, in a comparative perspective (i.e. as contrasted with the 'classical') and mainly with reference to traditional oral poetry. To Andrzejewski (1981), for instance, the phrase refers to an unlimited number of traditional genres which, compared with classical genres, are used for less serious purposes. He writes,

> The miniature genres, though equally cherished, were concerned with matters of lesser importance such as entertainment at dances or providing relief for monotonous pursuits such as watering camels, weaving mats, pounding cereals, rowing or long-distance marching (Andrzejewski, 1981: 5).

Mohamed Abdullahi (1989), on the other hand, although he does not provide us with a clear definition of what the term 'miniature genres' stands for in his analysis, is closer to Andrzejewski's application in terms of reference to traditional dance and work songs. However, from his emphasis on what he calls 'the smaller genres' (p. 36ff) and from the kind of genres he has selected to illustrate his argument, we understand that according to Rirache, a 'miniature genre' means a very short-lined form of traditional verse, a characteristic feature not applicable to the genres described by Johnson which are neither short-lined nor exclusively traditional. While the length of a typical line of any of the four genres grouped by Johnson is normally 13-14 morae, the line length in some of the genres targeted by Rirache is as short as just four morae (see below). To illustrate the differences between the two types of oral poetry studied in the two works, consider the following two couplets. The first (A) is a modern love *heello* cited and translated by Johnson (1996: 62) and the second (B), which is identified by Rirache (1989: 17), is a women's work song

for pounding grains in the mortar, in Somali '*badar-tun*':

A. *Sidii baxrasaaf ku yaalla bustaan*
ayuun baad hadba ii bidhaantaa

Like a eucalyptus tree growing in a garden,
You always appear to me from a distant place.

B. *Mooyaha*
Magacii?
The mortar
What is its name?

Moreover, Johnson makes his concept of a 'miniature' crystal clear when he writes:

> As the name of the family implies, the miniature poem is short. Its usual length is from two to four lines, though single line poems have been composed as well as ones with six, eight or even more lines. (Ibid., p. 28)

These obviously different interpretations of the term prompt the question, what do we mean by 'miniature genres'? 'Miniature' in what sense? Is it in terms of the line length, as indicated by Rirache? Or in terms of the length of the whole poem as explained by Johnson? Or is it because, from the point of view of content, it is 'concerned with matters of lesser importance' (Andzejewski, 1981: 5) compared with the 'classical'? We find no clear answers in the literature on the subject thus far.

Moreover, a positive answer to any of the above questions would lead to another set of questions. If, for instance, we adopt the metre-based possibility, i.e. that a genre is considered as 'miniature' based on the shortness of its lines, the question that arises would be what about genres such as the *geeraar*, which is often counted as being a 'classical' genre, because of its serious themes, but which has one of the shortest line ranges? To which of the two–supposedly contrasting categories it belongs: to the 'classical' or the 'miniature'?

The content-based categorisation as it stands is not less problematic either. In the

past the boundary between serious and light genres was quite clear: each category had its separate characteristics and functions. In post-independence times however, things have remarkably changed and intermingled. Genres traditionally used exclusively for light, entertainment purposes have taken over the task of dealing with complex social and political issues. Examples are the *saar* and the *jiifto*. I shall discuss this in greater detail in chapter 3.

In light of this, one feels reluctant to use of the term 'miniature genres' for the intended purposes and this makes us understand why Andrzejewski reluctantly refers to the term as 'the so-called 'miniature genres' (Andrzejewski, 1981: 5).

The preceding discussion leads us to conclude that the use of the term 'miniature genres' for the intended classification needs to be reconsidered. I contend that the term 'light genres' (used by Andrzejewski, 1967: 5) is much more adequate in English, while in Somali the compound word '*maanso-maaweelo*' offers an appropriate equivalent or alternative. Somalis use this term to refer to this type of poetry although in a broader sense the word *maaweelo* loosely means entertainment. I will discuss this further in the last section of this chapter.

The second term in the above pair, the word 'classical' is less controversial in the Somali context. In its general use, the word 'classical' often denotes something which belongs to an established system of methods or principles with connotations of seriousness and high standard. The first scholarly work in which the term was used most extensively to categorise Somali poetry was the collaborative work by Andrzejewski and Lewis (1964) in which they divided Somali poetry into three categories: classical poetry, traditional and modern songs. They described 'classical poetry' as being 'composed as conscious and studied works of poetic art which, if well received win lasting fame for their authors' (Andrzejewski and Lewis (1964: 47). They placed under this category the three genres of the *gabay*, the *geeraar* and the *jiifto*. The latter can be conisdered also as *masafo* (see chapter 3 for details). The nature of the Somali poems collected in this work and placed under this classification fit the general criteria mentioned above. The authors targeted various

samples from the earliest available oral classics by celebrated 19th and early 20th century poets from Raage Ugaas to Ismaaciil Mire and Salaan Carrabey. This was the oldest they had managed to find and collect. Here, it is worth noting that Andrzejewski has observed, in a later work, that there is a striking contradiction between the ability of the individual Somali to memorise long poems to the letter for many years and the inability of the collective oral memory of the Somalis to extend beyond two centuries. Surprised by this, Andrzejewski writes:

> In 1854, as we have seen, Burton testified to the Somali devotion to poetry [described them as 'a nation of poets']. It seems unlikely that the flowering of the poetic art that we find in the 19th and 20th centuries could have come suddenly into existence without being preceded by a long period of poetic activity, and yet almost nothing survived from any earlier time. There is one poem – a meditation on the qualities of God – by a famous cleric, Sheekh Cali Cabduraxmaan, who lived in the 18th century and some others which may be earlier but these are anonymous and therefore very difficult to date. It is a mystery why the oral memory of Somalis does not extend beyond two centuries as far as poetry is concerned. (Andzejewski, 1993: 3).

One of the other works in which the term 'classical' has been commented on relatively recently is Axmed (1993). In this work the author argues that Somali poetry

> is generally divided into two categories, classical and modern. Classical poetry is older and has a unified scansion system within each genre. The modern poem, called *heello*, resembles Indian song patterns from which it is derived (Axmed, 1993: 19).

Generally speaking, the term 'classical' is frequently used in literature on Somali poetry to refer to the serious poetry of pre-colonial and early colonial times as distinct from the light one. Somalis use the phrase *gabaygii raggii hore,* lit. 'poetry by men of the past' (Yamyam, 2003; Shube, 1997) to refer to the kind of poetry termed 'classical' by Andrzejewski and Lewis. The underlying connotation of the Somali phrase 'raggii hore' – which is difficult to translate into English – implies a high standard attributed to the poetry of the old, in alignment with the spirit of the popular maxim, *rag waa raggii hore hadalna waa intuu yiri*, freely, 'the quality and

wisdom of the old is unparalleled'.

Thus if the term 'classical' is to be reserved for the earlier works of a serious nature, which are likely to stand the test of time then another term is needed to describe the contemporary or later works of the same nature. Alternatively, we need to come up with a term which can accommodate the serious poem of all times.

In this respect, established Somali terminology offers some alternatives to both terms of 'classical' and 'miniature genres', an observation which lends credence to the statement made by Andrzejewski, Pilaszewicz and Tyloch above, in relation to the relevance of indigenous genre naming. This is by no means to suggest that the existing Somali literary terminology provides us with a sufficient and satisfactory supply of terms for all the literary aspects which cry for adequate naming and classification. As a matter of fact, literary nomenclature in Somali is not free from the confusion explained above with regards to English terminology, as we shall see shortly. Nonetheless, one could be closer to the required degree of accuracy by grounding one's nomenclature on original Somali terminology, i.e. by adopting relevant Somali terms, where available, aided, perhaps, by the closest English translation, if any. In this respect, I shall present towards the end of the next section some possibly useful terms from the indigenous Somali nomenclature. First however, let us consider one more pair of terms with links to the above discussion.

2.4 *Maanso* vs. *hees*

The two terms of *maanso* (poetry) and *hees* (song) as two distinct categories of Somali poetry have been commented on rather extensively in the literature on Somali poetry. However, it should be noted that the subject matter has been commented on in different ways by different scholars. A comprehensive review of this literature is found in an innovative article titled 'On the concept of 'definitive text' in Somali poetry', by Martin Orwin (2003). One of the authors of the said literature, Said Sheikh Samatar, contends that

> Somalis divide their poetry into two general categories: poetry

> (*maanso*) and song (*hees* or *heello*). *Hees* are modern songs and have their origins roughly in the fourth decade of the twentieth century while *maanso* is a more traditional form whose roots fade, as do other genres in the literature, into the penumbra of unrecorded times (p.74).

Commenting on this Orwin rightly remarks that Said 'restricts the term *hees* to the modern variety which developed out of the *heello* and does not discuss work and dance songs, the traditional *hees*. Thus the way he presents the distinction is not analogous to the way I am presenting it here' (Orwin, 2003: 337). Orwin offers a clear description of both *maanso* and *hees* in a contrasting fashion; he describes *maanso*

> as poetry whose composer is known, which is composed prior to performance and which must be presented verbatim. On the other hand, *hees* (apart from modern *hees* …) is poetry which is generally performed in association with work or dance; the composers of *hees* are not generally known and there is no expectation of verbatim performance (ibid: 336).

Axmed Cali Abokor too in his book, *Somali Pastoral Worksongs* (Axmed, 1993) comments on the conception of *maanso* versus *hees*. He first divides Somali pastoral poetry into classical and modern and then sub-divides the classical further into *maanso* and *heeso* (plural of *hees*). In his understanding, 'the *maanso* category, denoting serious poetry, includes the genres of *gabay*, *geeraar*, and *jiifto*, all composed by male adults and all dealing with important social and political matters (Axmed, 1993: 19). Thus, to him *maanso* consists of the above genres and *heeso* are the work songs.

From the above review we note that the use of the two terms, *maanso* and *hees* in the literature on Somali poetry is floating and not settled. At times the way in which the terms are used in certain scholarly works is not consistent with the Somali perception of the same terms. Somalis use the term *maanso* in a broader, more inclusive sense. Here *maanso* is the generic name of all types of poetry, and not for the serious poems alone, as sometimes perceived wrongly. In fact it is used as the Somali word for or an analogy of the English term 'poetry'. The *hees* types of

poetry are therefore considered as part of the broad category of *maanso*. Based on this the entry '*maanso*' is given the following definition in Puglielli and Cabdalla's *Qaamuuska Af-Soomaaliga* (Somali Dictionary), the largest, most recent and most comprehensive Somali dictionary so far: '*suugaanta qayb ka mid ah oo ka kooban waxyaabo badan oo la tirsho sida, gabayga, masafada, heesta iwm* [part of literature which consists of many composed varieties, such as the *gabay*, the *masafo*, the *hees* etc']. (Puglielli and Cabdalla Cumar Mansuur, 2012: 557). Here *hees* is clearly considered as one of the *maanso* components.

More evidence showing that Somalis consider *hees* as part of *maanso* is found in references made by Somali poets within their poetry whereby they refer to *hees* as belonging to *maanso*. The following poetic line, which is known to many Somalis is an example:

> *Maansada qaraamiga yaryare, qayliyaa dilay e.*
> The *maanso* has been destroyed by those little *qaraami* singers shouting around.

The line comes from a famous, classic poem titled *Qabyo* composed in the early 1950s by celebrated poet, Cabdillaahi Suldaan "Timacadde". He is criticising a group of young singers called 'Qaraami' whose newly emerged type of songs–also called *qaraami* or *heello*–became popular with the young people while the older generation, to which the poet belonged, frowned upon them (see below for details). It is obvious from the meaning of the line that although the poet was critical of the *qaraami* type of songs he considered them as being a type of *maanso*, one which he considered to be of lower standard. *Qaraami* was the modern song of the time in Somalia and *heello* was another name for the same thing. I will elaborate on this in the next section.

Moreover, reference to the *hees* as being a *maanso* genre is found in scholarly works. As observed by Orwin (2003: 337) Ahmed Adan Ahmed (1984) considers

heello and consequently *hees* as being *maanso*. He describes it as 'the most utilized genre of *maanso* throughout Somalia' (Ahmed, 1984:335).

Coming back to the use of the term *hees*, it is observed that this term is sometimes used in scholarly works in a rather inaccurate or simplistic way, as we have seen from the review of the literature above. For instance Said Sheikh Samatar restricts the term to the modern song (Said, 1982: 74) while, conversely, Sheekh Jaamac restricts it to the traditional *hees* consisting of the *hees-hawleed* (worksong) and *hees-cayaareed* (dance song) (Jaamac, 1974: iv).

As a matter of fact the term is used by Somalis in a broad sense which denotes all types of light poetry of an entertainment nature. It is interesting to note that, aside from the classical genres described above and the others classified as serious genres, the rest of the vast corpus of Somali poetic genres are individually known as *hees*, derived from the infinitive *heesid* (to sing). There are divisions, sub-divisions and sub-sub-divisions to this very broad category. The art of *hees* is first broken into two major categories: *hees-hiddeed* (traditional songs) and *hees-casri* (the modern song). Two extensive discussions of *hees-casri* are innovatively provided by Johnson (1996b) and Kapteijns with Mariam (1999) both of which I have reviewed in chapter 1. I will also describe this variety further in the present discussion. The other division, *hees-hiddeed*, is further divided into *hees-hawleed* (work songs) and *hees-cayaareed* (dance songs). The two types of *hees-hiddeed* have best been described in the words of Sheekh Jaamac Cumar Ciise, who writes,

> *Hees hawleed waa heeska hawsha lagu qabto, hawshaasu hawl xoolaad ha ahaato ama hawl farsamo ha ahaatee.*
> *Hees cayaareedna waa heeskii sacab ama jaanta loo tumo ama durbaan loo garaaco oo looga jeedo farax, maaweelo iyo madadaalo iyo wixii la mid ah* (Jaamac, 1974: iv).
>
> Work song is the song to which work is undertaken, whether that work is livestock or handicraft.
> And the dance song is the song in which clapping or footstamping is done, or for which a drum is beaten and which is intended for expressing happiness, amusement

and entertainment etc.[22]

Each of these two categories of *hees-hiddeed* is divided again into groupings, sub-groupings and a large number of genres, all with their own specific names, metric structures and identifying melodic chants. For example, the *hees-hawleed* (work song) is further broken into *heesaha xoolaha* (livestock songs), *heesaha shubaasha* (watering songs), *heesaha badda* (sea songs) and so forth. Again in the case of the livestock songs each type of livestock has its own *hees-hawleed*, like *heesta geela* (camel songs), *heesta idaha* (sheep songs) etc. Virtually, every single activity carried out by a traditional Somali is accompanied by a certain form of verse/*hees* chanted to ease off the pressure of these tedious activities in a hostile arid environment, or to provide some 'relief for monotonous pursuits such as watering camels, weaving mats, pounding cereals, rowing or long-distance marching' (Andrzejewski, 1981: 5). Most of these sung verses have their own particular names, but they all share the generic name of *hees(o)*. A detailed description of *heeso*, especially *hees-hawleed* (work songs) is found in Axmed, 1993.

2.5 *Heello* or *hees*?

The twin terms of *heello* and *hees* are the last pair of terms which, in my view, need to be considered for clarification and deeper understanding. I have already discussed *hees* in the preceding section in association with the broader conception of *maanso*. In the present section however, I will consider *hees* in relation to *heello*. The discussion that follows is motivated mainly by the observation that the term *heello* is incorrectly used, in some scholarly works, to refer to the contemporary *hees-casri* (see below).

The two terms *heello* and *hees* are closely related. As a matter of fact they are two names for the same art form, the modern song, in different stages of development. The name *heello* was used in the period from the late 1940s to late 1950s after which period the other name *hees* or *hees-casri*, which is the one used to date, had taken over. The current *hees-casri* is the product of a historical process divided into

22 Translated in Orwin, 2003.

different stages of development with different names. This process has been commented on extensively in the literature on Somali poetry (Andrzejewski and Lewis, 1964; Johnson, 1996b; Andrzejewski, 1967, 1981; Maxamed, 1987; Kapteijns with Mariam, 1999; Orwin, 2003; Mohamed and Abdulahi, 2011) and duplication is not necessary. The first and most extensive study of this historical process is Johnson, 1974. The second extensive discussion on *hees-casri* is found in Kapteijns with Mariam (1999) where love songs particularly sung by women are focused on. Kapteijns provides a concise yet comprehensive description of the metamorphosis of *hees-casri* from *balwo* to *heello* to *hees*. Building on Johnson's earlier account, Kapteijns summarises the emergence of

> two new genres that gave birth to the contemporary Somali popular song (*hees*) … The first new genre was the *balwo*, a short, sensual, philosophical, often witty or even mischievous love song … The creator of this genre was Cabdi Deeqsi, nicknamed "Sinimo", a truck driver on the roads between Zeila and Djibouti on the coast and Boorame and Diredabe in the interior' (Kapteijns, 1999: 104).

Further describing the metamorphosis from *balwo* to *heello* to *hees* and the nature of the *heello*, which also was called *qaraami*,[23] Kapteijns writes,

> It was partly under the influence of the new broadcasting services that the *balwo*, in 1948, gave birth to the *heello* (the second new genre of which the modern popular song is an outgrowth). At first, the heello was little more than a series of *balwo*s strung together. Such strings of *balwo*s are still created and performed and are now called *qaraami).* … it [*heello*] was still a love song , but it was a longer poem than the *balwo*, usually composed by one poet. It had an individual melody and a musical string' (Kapteijns, 1999: 105).

Another important feature that characterised the *heello* (as well as the *balwo*) was that its lyrics were exclusively structured in one unified *miisaan*, that of the *wiglo*-turned-*dhaanto*, since the birth of the new song in the early 1940s, under the name of '*balwo*' to the late 1950s. In the most recent published work on the subject (to my

23 I shall describe this term below and the poetic form it refers to.

knowledge), Mohamed and Abdulahi (2011) the authors state that

> *heelladu sida belwada ayay dhismo ahaan ku salaysnayd dhaantada, wiglada (hirwada). Heelladu waxaa sidii qaraamiga oo kale loogu subcin jirey gole fadhi wadaag oo qofba intuu tuduc heello ah soo tuuro ayay wareegi jirtey* (Mohamed and Abdulahi, 2011: 24).
> Like *balwo*, the *heello* was structured in the metre of the *dhaanto*, the *wiglo* (the *hirwo*). Like *qaraami*, *heello* was composed collectively in a seated gathering of youths where everyone threw a line of *heello* in a rotating manner.

In his pioneering work on the development of the art form *Heelloy*, John Johnson (1996b) understandably describes the difficulties he had experienced in naming the poetic form he was dealing with, namely, the modern Somali song. In this arduous task he has chosen to disagree with terminology previously favoured by Andrzejewski and Lewis (1964).

> What I have called "*heello* A and B", Andzejewski and Lewis 1964, call "*heello*" and "modern *hees*". I have pointed out that Somalis themselves use two terms for the modern poem, *heello* and *hees*... This usage is further complicated because the term *hees* is used for several other genres and the term *heello* is almost always used when the modern poem is under discussion by Somalis. Andrzejewski and Lewis's terminology then presents a problem, because it is somewhat oversimplified; (Johnson, 1996: 91n).

Professor Johnson was right in maintaining that the term *hees* is also used for genres other than the modern song, as I have explained in the preceding section. Besides, Johnson's innovative endeavour should be appreciated if one considers the fact that in the 1960s when he started carrying out his research, the term *heello* was, perhaps, still used by some, albeit on a remarkably diminished level, as noticed earlier by Andrzejewski and Lewis (1964); it was seemingly used by some people side by side with the then emerging term, *hees*, which was set to replace it.

Notwithstanding, later developments have failed Johnson and confirmed that Andrzejewski and Lewis were on the right track when they opted to the use of the term *heello* as the old name of the art form and *hees* as the current one. As rightly

documented by Johnson himself (1996b) the name *heello* was itself the successor of a previous name of the new song, *balwo.* The renaming became necessary, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, when the artists decided to replace the controversial name, *balwo*, an Arabic loan-word meaning 'misfortune'. Abdilaahi Qarshi, one of the first innovators who developed the genre, explains:

> In Somali usage, the word had acquired the implication of profligacy in matters of sex, womanising, drinking, and so on. Thus, we see that the name *balwo* which had negative connotation in Somali was adding to the unacceptability of the '*balwo* movement' in respectable society. It provided the religious leaders with ammunition to have it suppressed and outlawed. So we changed the name to *heello* and began the first few bars of the song not with balwo [as done before] but with the acceptable traditional invitation to dance 'heelloy heellelloy . . . .' (Abdilahi, in Johnson, 1996: xii).

About a decade later the name of the genre changed again into *hees*, as related by Kapteijns above. Like *heello*, *hees* is a traditional Somali name with a broader range of uses, as discussed earlier on.[24]

The stated change in the name coincided with other changes in some more fundamental aspects of the art form. From around the early sixties, the composers began to devise the metrical structure of a wide variety of established genres to regulate the structure of the *hees-casri* (Kapteijns, 1999). In contrast with the *heello* the *hees-casri* had started to make use of a wide variety of metre types which belong to an unlimited number of genres. Orwin rightly observes that 'as the *heello* developed into modern *hees* different metres were used by poets including non-prestigious metres of traditional *hees*, work songs and dance songs.' (Orwin, 2003: 343).

Another early 1960s major innovation was the development of the music component into a more complex standard. (Xudeydi, 2011). Before the 1960s the melody just imitated the rhythmic pattern of the lyrics. Later, however, with an increased maturity and with the coming of more musical instruments, such as the clarinet, saxophone and organ on top of the flute, the violin and the lute, the melody of *hees*-

24 The details of why and how this change had taken place remains a matter for further research.

casri further developed. As John Johnson remarks, 'with the addition of more and more musical instruments, more and more possibilities of variation and combination arise' (Johnson, 1996b: 217). Thus, the new innovation was that, in place of the formerly unified, simple melody, every new song now acquired its distinct melody, which no longer imitates the pattern of the lyrics.

A third earlier and, perhaps, more significant innovation was the upgrading of the themes dealt with in the Somali modern song. While romantic love remained the only theme of the *balwo* and early *heello* or *qaraami*, more sophisticated political and social themes were introduced from the mid-1950s. It should be noted here that this latter, content-related change preceded the former two, which took place in the arena of form; its initial phase dates back to the heyday of the *heello.* As Orwin remarks, 'after initially being love poetry, it [*heello*] began to reflect the political aspirations of the younger generation of urban Somalis, and in the 1950s the *heello* became the main vehicle for political comment in the struggle for independence' (Orwin, 2003: 343). The turning point came in 1954, when

> an event occurred which changed the whole course of political life and led eventually to full independence. This precipitant was the final liquidation of British administration in the Hawd and Reserve Areas and the complete surrender of these vital grazing lands to Ethiopian control. (Lewis, 1965: 150).

The Somali reaction to the surrender of these Somali territories to Ethiopia ' was swift and bitter' (Johnson, 1996b: 96). An overwhelming outcry erupted and was expressed in many ways ranging from 'riots and large demonstrations' and even 'armed clashes at the new border' (ibid., p. 99) to a new wave of dissent poems, plays and, more significantly to our discussion, new *heello*s with political themes for the first time. According to Johnson (1996b) it was this historical event that had inspired the historical change in the theme of the *heello*. The artists seized the opportunity, utilising the momentum to group themselves into much better organised troupes who were able to take the lead in the now politicised cultural movement. *Walaala Hargeisa* in the north and *Hay sheegsheegin* in the south were at the forefront of these fully organised troupes who used the new art for championing

national independence.[25]

However, in spite of the stated, earlier emergence of the political theme, the extensive use of a multitude of themes outside the love domain only came in the early 1960s as one of the characteristics of the new *hees-casri* (see below for further details).

The inner workings of the stated changes which occurred in the art of *heello* later towards the early 1960s and whether the name change related to them or whether it was just a coincidence is a matter for further research, beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, one thing is quite obvious. As Andrzejewski and Lewis (1964) have observed, as far back as the early sixties, the name *hello* had gone out of use for current songs.

In his ground-breaking article, on the rise of the *balwo*, concludes that

> The *balwo* is now a part of the history of Somali culture which the younger generation only knows from the nostalgic accounts of the middle-aged. It was an interesting experiment in semantic concentration which may be of some significance to a student of the theory of literature. There seem to be very few parallels to it anywhere else in the world. Andrzejewski (1967: 14).

The same thing applies to the term *heello* today. Indeed, it is only in the 'nostalgic' memory of some aged people that the present younger, even middle-aged generations of Somalis would find the word *heello* and would know about what it stands for. The use of the term is now only relevant in the context of the historical studies of Somali cultural heritage. As far as contemporary usage is concerned, the word has faded well into lexical archaism. This explains why Orwin politely commented on the use of the term *heello* in Ahmed, 1984 in reference to the popularity of the modern *hees* of the 1980s. He writes in a footnote, 'note that at the time of publication of his article, and I assume at the time of writing, the use of

25 For fuller details of these related political and cultural events, together with analysis and sample texts, see Johnson, 1996b: 95ff; Maxamed Daahir, 1987: 27ff; Cabdillaahi Qarshi, 1992; Yuusuf, 1996.

heello had declined and modern *hees* was the most popular form of *maanso*. It may be that he was using the terms somewhat interchangeably' (Orwin, 2003: 337n).

In the light of the preceding discussion, I agree with John Johnson in his innovative division of the historical development of the new song into three distinct periods of development, at the time of his research. I also agree with him in calling the first two periods '*Heello*: Period One' ' and '*Heello*: Period Two'; but I disagree with him in referring to the third as another *Heello* Period Three. In fact, what Johnson has described in this part of his work (p. 117ff), under the heading 'The *Heello*: Period Three' is referred to by Somalis as *hees* and not as *heello*. This type of song produced in that period of time was no more considered *heello*, neither in terms of its main characteristics nor in terms of the name used by Somalis to refer to it, which was *hees*.

The use of the term *heello* should therefore be restricted to referring to the type of modern songs produced from the late 1940s to the late 1950s which had their specific characteristics in which they were clearly distinct from what we know today as *hees* (see Andrzejewski, 1967; Johnson, 1996b; Kapteijns, 1999; Mohamed and Abdulahi, 2011). Even in this case, there is a fact which has hitherto escaped scholarly attention and which therefore deserves to be brought out. There is a second name used by Somalis to refer to the *heello* type of songs, as hinted above. This name, which is used much more often than *heello*, is *qaraami*, a loan word meaning passionate love in old Arabic. The use of this name in the Somali context began in the mid-1930s when a group of young poets introduced a new form of light poetry (light *gabay*). The popular name of the group was *Kabacad*, literally, 'those with white shoes', so named because they were distinguished by wearing white trainers which were fashionable at the time. However, the poetic form they had introduced was called *qaraami* (Garabyare, 1995; Yuusuf, 1997; Cumar Dhuule, 1996).

Despite its importance from a historical point of view, the history and the legacy of *Kabacad* and the *qaraami* movement escaped scholarly attention and consequently, no accurate information about them is available in any known written sources. The only surviving source of some information about the *Kabacad* movement is oral

history preserved by elders and some scattered recordings of interviews with people who either were contemporaries with the movement or close to it. These interviews were conducted either by concerned persons, including myself, or by radio stations, such as Radio Mogadishu, Radio Hargeisa, and The National Radio and Television of Djibouti. Delving into a detailed discussion of various aspects of this movement is beyond the scope of this thesis; it requires separate research. Suffice it here to outline a brief note which I deem important, given the fact that the historical significance of the *Qaraami*, as a bridge to the Somali transitional literature, is relevant to the present study. The information contained in this note is gathered from interviews I had with three veterans of Somali performing arts who were then alive but who have now deceased. These are Ibraahim Jaamac "Garabyare" (Garabyare, 1995), who was a member of the *balwo* artists, the immediate successors of the *Kabacad*, Cabdillahi Qarshi (Cabdillahi, 1992), Cumar Dhuule (Cumar, 1996) and Yuusuf Xaaji Adan (Yuusuf, 1996) all of whom were among the founding fathers of *heello*, the successor of *balwo*. A second source which I used is Mohamed Sh. Hassan and Abdulahi Ahmed's recent book, *Taariikhda Riwaayadaha iyo Fanka Soomaaliyeed* (Mohamed and Abdulahi, 2011) which touches upon the subject.

The *Qaraami* movement started in the historic town of Saylac (Zeila) and then expanded to other towns in what was then the British Protectorate of Somaliland, towns such as Hargeisa and Berbera where the *qaraami* became popular with the young people while strongly opposed by members of the older generation, especially the religious leaders and older and more established poets. *Qaraami* poems were created collectively in a gathering of young poets sitting in a circle. They improvised short verses in turn, in what they called *lug-kowle* (one-lined), *labaale* (couplet) and *saddexle* (triplets). One of them would recite either of the above three; the last half-line (*hooris*) would be chanted by all in relish, as a chorus and then the next poet takes over and so on. They aimed at self expression and self entertainment. This method of poetic creation and transmission was an innovation alien to the Somali *gabay* tradition. The *Kabacad* called it 's*ubcis*' loosely, 'rotation'. Both this term and the method itself were borrowed from traditional religious schools that used them in Quranic revising sessions.

When the movement became highly popular, the *qaraami* poets were regularly invited to perform their art as entertainment components in wedding ceremonies (*aroos*) and popular parties known as *gaaf*, to which crowds of youths were attracted when they hear "*caawa kabacaddii baa halkaas ka heesaysa*" (tonight the *Kabacad* are performing there) which became a familiar popular announcement (Garabyare, 1995; Yuusuf, 1996). I could not establish accurate information about the names of all the members of the *Kabacad* poets, however, the most prominent of them included Muuse Gudaad, Cumar Mushtee and Daba-ka-eri. The famous poet Cilmi Boodhari, who is popularly believed to have died of love in 1941 (see Andrzejewski et al, 1985, pp. 374, 394; 1993, pp. 66 -68; Rashiid, 1975) was closely associated with *Kabacad*.

Although the *qaraami* poetry was structured in the familiar *gabay* metre it was an innovative development in a number of important aspects in which the *Kabacad* turned away from the traditional versification of the *gabay*. The contrasts between the latter and the *qaraami* are summarised in the following table:

Traditional gabay	*Qaraami gabay (Qaraami One)*
Serious	Light
Composed by individual, known poet	Collective creation, anonymous in most part
Composed by older poets	Composed by young poets – youth culture
Composed in a pastoral environment	Urban environment
Diverse serious themes	Single theme (love)
Complex language	Simple language
Meant for public forum	Meant for self entertainment
Often pre-prepared	Often improvised
Traditional, familiar *luuq* (melodic chant)	New, innovative *luuq*, not heard before

Given below is an anonymous, typical couplet illustrating what the *qaraami gabay*

was like, in aspects such as structure, theme, language and imagery:

> *Jacayl igu ballaadhaa i helay, tobanjirkaagiiye*
> *Waa kaa jirkaygii cuniyo, johoraddaydiiye.*[26]
>
> I was captured by an overwhelming love at the age of ten
> Look how it has eaten away my body and my glamour.

It is interesting to observe that *Qaraami* One shares with *Qaraami* Two (*heello*) all of the nine aspects in which it differs from the traditional *gabay*, except for the *luuq*. This justifies the fact that they bear the same name, an indication that they are closely related.

The historical importance of '*Qaraami* One' is that it was the innovation that paved the way for the emergence of the new forms of modern Somali literature, namely, the *balwo*, the *heello* (*Qaraami* Two), *hees-casri* and *riwaayad* or modern drama (Yuusuf, 1996; Cabdillahi, 1992). The *balwo* came as replacement to or as a direct descendant of *Qaraami* One (ibid); *heello* came as a developed *balwo*, and later it was moulded into *hees-casri*. On the other hand, the *heello* and *hees-casri* provided the base on which the modern *riwaayad* (play) was built and *hees* has remained an integrated component in its construction (ibid). Herein lies the historical significance of the *qaraami* (*Qaraami* One) as the gateway to the emergence of the new forms of Somali literature. It seems to be the first innovation that started to provide the *link* between the old and the new in the passage from the traditional way of Somali versification to the modern one. *Qaraami* could be considered as the link in the transition process that has given rise to the new forms of Somali literature. As part of the speedy urbanisation process and the flux of young Somalis from rural areas to the burgeoning towns, members of *Kabacad* seem to have moved with them the traditional *gabay* from a pastoral environment to the city and then adjusted it to

26 The late Cabdillahi Qarshi recited it to me (Cabdillahi, 1993).

the needs of the urban environment, an adjustment that has continued in the new forms of transitional literature in both arenas of poetry and drama, the subject of this thesis.

If this has been established then the *qaraami* deserves special attention in the study of the historical development of Somali literature.

In spite of this seemingly important historical significance, it is surprising that the *qaraami* has remained overlooked; it has not received the scholarly attention it deserves whereas the *balwo*, which my sources consider as less important (ibid), has received relatively extensive documentation and scholarly attention. In the above mentioned interview, Cabdillahi Qarshi asserted that *Qaraami* One was more important than the *balwo* in terms of duration and impact. While the *balwo* only lasted for the first few years of the 1940s with relatively limited participation, the *qaraami* continued from the mid-1930s to the early 1940s. He added that in impact it was more popular than the *balwo* and it attracted more participants. Added to this is, according to Cabdillahi, the historical significance as it the first innovation that linked between the traditional way of versification and the modern, emerging one.

Although this new form was structured in the *gabay* metre, it was innovative in aspects such as its theme, which was exclusively romantic love and its soothing melodic chant. These new characteristics made the *qaraami* poems highly popular with the young generation while it was fiercely opposed by the older generation in general and the religious circles in particular. The most famous member of the *Kabacad* poets was Cilmi Boodhari, who is said to have died of love. Further details would be too involved for this thesis. For further information about *qaraami* one see Mohamed and Abdulahi, 2011).

This initial phase of *qaraami*, which had flourished in the 1930s, can be called '*Qaraami* One'. The name and some of the '*Qaraami* One' characteristics (such as the reliance on love theme alone, as indicated in the name) extended to what may be called '*Qaraami* Two, which emerged in the late 1940s as a new form of love song. This is what has been referred to by Johnson (1996b) and other scholars as '*heello*', whereas contemporary Somalis refer to it as '*qaraami*'. In other words, while the songs that make up '*Qaraami* Two' are the ones referred to in scholarly writings as '*heello*', contemporary Somalis do not refer to them as such; instead they call them '*qaraami*'. '*Wax heeso qaraami ah ma haysaa?*' [have you got any qaraami songs?] is the common query usually put to music shops by contemporary music lovers. During my data collection work I noticed that none of the informed people I interviewed used the name *heello* when referring to the songs in question. Everyone, including such veterans of Somali art as Cabdillaahi Qarshe, Xudeydi and Cumar Dhuule, all of whom were participants of the *qaraami/heello* movement, used exclusively the name *qaraami*. When I occasionally asked them: 'what about *heello*?' they would answer: 'it was the same thing'. Mindful of this, Kapteijns, in her book, *Women's Voices in a Man's World* uses exclusively the term *qaraami* in reference to this category of Somali songs (see Kapteijns with Mariam, 1999):

It is interesting to note that despite the fact that *qaraami* songs have not been composed for over half a century (at the time of writing) people continue to enjoy listening to them with relish and nostalgia; in particularl, they have turned to them since the 1980s, the dark period in Somali history, a period of decline and self-destruction through civil war and anarchy which have resulted, among other things, in an unthinkable cultural impoverishment in the country. According to a number of sellers in Somali music shops in Hargeysa, Djibouti and London, whom I

interviewed in 2007 and 2011, recordings of *qaraami* music sell better than some new pop songs. Many people, including myself, find solace in listening to these classical love songs from the old good days, with their timeless aesthetic qualities, soothing melody and relaxed pace.[27] This has helped keep alive the name *qaraami* used for this artistic heritage whereas the name *heello* has faded into oblivion.

Taking this into consideration, it may be more relevant for future researchers to use the term *qaraami*, which is not only more familiar to younger generations, but also more accurate than the now archaic term *heello* when referring to that type of Somali love songs produced mainly in the decade of the1950s.

To sum up the preceding discussion on the related *hees* forms, one observes that the Somali modern song has gone under three metamorphoses or three stages of development. The first stage emerged and developed in the early 1940s under the name *balwo*; the second flourished from the late 1940s through to the 1950s and was known as *qaraami* or *heello* which by the early 1960s transformed into the *hees* we know today. This form, i.e., *heello/qaraami*, has its roots in the initial *qaraami* or '*Qaraami One'*–as I would propose to call it for convenience–from which the name and some other characteristics (e.g., the unified love theme) were carried over. The Qaraami Two is also considered as an outgrowth of the *balwo* with which it shares certain characteristics such as the unified *dhaanto* metre and the function of serving as the practitioners' self-entertainment, an aspect also shared by the *balwo* and *hees-hiddeed*.

It is interesting to note that, as part of the continuing transformation and transition

27 The art of *qaraami* has parallels in some neighbouring cultures. For instance, there are many similarities between this Somali *qaraami* and the Yemeni *dan*, especially in the coastal area of Hadramout (see Taher, 1987).

from older to newer forms, the double-unity, i.e., unity of theme (love) and unity of metre, which characterised all of the pre-*hees* forms, namely, *qaraami* one, *qaraami* two/*heello* and *balwo*, was changed by the early 1960s with the birth of the current *hees-casri*. In spite of the fact that the theme of love has continued to be the dominant one in the new *hees-casri*, a multitude of other themes were incorporated. Salient among these was the theme of *waddani*, lit. patriotism, in essence politics. In the perception of the average Somali of contemporary times, two different categories of *hees* exist: *hees jacayl* (love song) and *hees waddani* (political song).[28] On the other count, the unity of metre was replaced in the *hees-casri* by the use of different metrical structures belonging to a wide variety of genres with the *saar* and the *geeraar* in the lead, before the overriding of the *jiifto* from the mid-seventies onwards. This will be detailed in chapter 3.

Another important observation relevant to the focus of the present study is that the metamorphosis of the Somali modern song as described above displays a significant characteristic of *hees-casri* as being an art form in transition. This is manifest in two obvious aspects. Firstly, this art form is a product of a historical process with the main feature of being in transition from traditional to modern ways of life and artistic creation, both at the general societal level and at the level of literary creation respectively.[29] Secondly, the said transitional status is discerned in the fact that *hees-casri* bears mixed characteristics which belong to both the traditional culture of which the new form is an outgrowth and the modern one into which it has started to develop. The form incorporates certain aspects carried over from *hees-hiddeed*, especially from *hees-cayaareed* (dance song) and others associated with modern *maanso-goleed.* Examples of the first are the choice of love and courtship as central

28 See Kapteijns with Mariam, 1999.
29 This has already been delineated in chapter 1.

themes; the employment of pastoral imagery; gender contests based on *halxiraale* (puzzles) or intelligence tests and banter or arguments between the sexes. I have discussed elsewhere[30] the use of pastoral imagery in both *hees-cayaareed* and *hees-casri*. I have provided an illustration of the way in which *hees-cayaareed* used such techniques as gender contests, which included banter, *halxiraale*, etc in the example of the interesting exchanges between the two 19th Century *batar* dancers, Dhiidhi Kadiye and Geelo, discussed in chapter 3. An example of the presence of similar elements in the *hees-casri* is found in the famous *hees*, *Xaq miyaa*? (Is it Legitimate?) composed by Xasan Shiikh Muumin as part of the play *Shabeelnaagood* and sung in duet by Cabdi Muxumad Amiin and Hibo Maxamed (see Hassan, 1974: 92-4).

Commenting on the dual nature of the Somali modern song, Martin Orwin points out that, 'we see in modern *hees*, along with certain characteristics of traditional *hees*, strong presence of characteristics of *maanso*' (Orwin, 2003: 343). The most prominent characteristic which the *hees-casri* shares with the modern *maanso-goleed* is that it deals with contemporary social and political issues of national and global relevance (Johnson, 1996). Other modern aspects of *hees-casri* include the utilisation of instrumental music and the fact that it has been commercialised (Kapteijns with Mariam, 1999).

2.6 Conclusions

What has been discussed in the body of this chapter lead us to arrive at a number of important conclusions. The first is that the terminology used to date in the literature on Somali poetry is floating or not settled as yet. The use of certain terms is still in transition towards becoming refined and established, an ongoing process which

30 Maxamed Daahir, 1999.

requires further scholarly contribution. Included in the said terms are ‘genre’, ‘form’, ‘miniature genres’, *heello, maanso* and *hees.* The use of these terms as well as the bilateral relations between the forms they refer to, need to be paid more careful scholarly attention based on the actual use of the same by native Somalis, with certain innovative refinements where needed. This would help resolve the confusion that prevails.

Secondly, the *maanso* versus *hees* categorisation in particular, is frequently used by many. However, it is used differently in different works, as is the case with the term ‘miniature genres’. While there seems to be a general agreement on the relevance of such a dichotomy, apparent confusion exists as to what comes under each of these two broad categories of Somali poetry.

In light of this and of the preceding discussion in the main body of the chapter, I should like to propose three innovations for convenience in the present study, at least for the purpose of this thesis. First, I subscribe to the conception of ‘classical’ as used by Andrzejewski and Lewis, 1964; however, I would propose to restrict its use to the serious, traditional verse, i.e., the not-for-entertainment poetry produced in pre-colonial and early to middle colonial periods which has stood the test of time. No adequate Somali word presents itself at present as an analogy to the English term ‘classical’. Users of the Somali language may therefore adopt the familiar term ‘classic’ derivatively, hence, ‘*kalaasigga*’ in Somali adaptation, as do users of languages such as Arabic. Thus, for the purpose of the present thesis I shall use the term ‘classical’ to refer to the category of Somali verse described above.

Second, to make use of the existing indigenous terminology with slight innovative additions allowed by the lexical flexibility of the Somali language, I propose the use of the compound word ‘*maanso-goleed*’ (public forum poetry) in its broader sense than ‘classical’, which accommodates all forms of serious poetry of all times, past and present. This compound word is made up of the established term ‘*maanso’*

(poetry), as explained earlier, as a root, and '*goleed*', derived from '*gole*' (forum), with the genitive '*-eed*', added to specify the type of *maanso* at hand. This implies that the existence of other types of *maanso* is recognised. Thus the neologism is the Somali equivalent of the term 'public forum poetry', previously coined in English by Andrzejewski (1967, 1981, 1982), slightly extended to include all serious poetry of all times outside the *hees* domain. In the present study I will use both terms (the Somali and English versions) interchangeably; the Somali neologism may occur more frequently.

Third, the indigenous conception *'hees'* is very important. It conveniently serves as counterpart to the conception *maanso-goleed* thus accommodating all forms of Somali poetry, modern and traditional, outside the arena of *maanso-goleed*. It is both relevant and convenient to use the term *hees* to refer to any of those 'light' genres of Somali verse discussed in this chapter and previously treated in the literature on Somali poetry. Neologisms for various sub-categories are named. These include the two terms *hees-hawleed* (work song) and *hees-cayaareed* (dance song) used by Jaamac (1974) and Axmed (1993) as discussed. To these I have proposed to add the consistent use of the two terms of *hees-hiddeed* and *hees-casri* to respectively refer to the two broad categories into which the art of *hees* is divided.

In the process of naming and renaming the modern song, the three terms *balwo*, *qaraami* and *heello* were used in the early stages of the development of the art form, from the early 1940s to the early 1960s (see Johnson 1996). However, by the early1960s all these names faded away and the more developed form of the modern song was popularly renamed *hees*, referred to in this thesis as *hees-casri*, to distinguish it from *hees-hiddeed*. On the other hand, I shall use the latter term to refer to all different types of traditional *hees* as described earlier. In addition to my use of the generic Somali names discussed in the preceding pages, I shall refer, throughout the rest of this study, to different, individual, poetic genres using their indigenous names. Examples are *gabay*, *geeraar*, *saar*, etc. Needless to say this is due to the lack of any English analogy to such Somali terminology in this context.

On the other hand, however, terms such as *xarafraac* (alliteration) and *miisaan* (metre) for which reasonable English equivalents are readily available, will occasionally be given due translation, especially at the beginning of the sections in which they frequently occur.

Aside from the issue of terminology and categorisation, which constitute the main focus of this chapter, I hope to have presented ideas and evidence which support my argument that the modern Somali song shares the characteristic feature of being transitional with the other leading forms of modern Somali literature, namely, the public forum poetry (*maanso-goleed*) and the drama, both of which are the main focus of the rest of this thesis.

CHAPTER 3

TRANSITIONAL NATURE OF POST-INDEPENDENCE SOMALI POETRY: CHANGING ASPECTS

3.1 Introduction

In chapter 1 I outlined the historical and social changes in post-war Somali society and the resultant transitional status of the context of Somali, post-independence literature. I pointed out that these changes and transitional environment gave rise to new, transitional poetry and drama. Post-independence poets and playwrights strived to adjust themselves to this changing context employing a blend of old and new elements to construct their new art in such a way that meets the needs of the new society and was attuned to the changing tastes of their transitional audience (Cali Sugulle, 1997).

In the case of the poetry, one element in which the transitional status of Somali post-independence poetry is discerned is its combination of traditional and innovative aspects of form. While this poetry parted with a number of techniques that had featured Somali poetry over the centuries, as will be explicated shortly; it kept with the use of another set of similarly old elements of form. This is an indication that the poetry under investigation hovers between traditional and modern ways of creation; hence its transitional character.

On the changing side, my research led me to identify a number of traditional aspects of form which are fading away from post-independence poetry. Salient among these are the predominance of the *gabay* genre in composing the serious poem (*maanso-goleed*); the use of melodic chant (*luuq*) which used to feature in almost all genres of Somali traditional poetry; the elaborate poetic introduction customarily sustained to open any serious piece of classical poetry and the poet's boasting. Another aspect in which the transitional nature of this poetry is evident is its method of transmission. The traditional poetry's purely oral method gradually develops into a new method based on

orality substantially aided or blended with new technology as well as writing, as will be elucidated.

In this chapter I shall examine all of these aspects and the ways in which they are changing. On the other hand, there are two important structural devices which will be presented as examples of the continued presence of tradition in the poetic composition of the post-independence period. These two unchanged features, namely, alliteration (*xaraf-raac*) and metre (*miisaan*) are the subject of the next chapter.

3.2 Predominance of the *gabay* challenged

Genre preference is the first area of the stated changes in the post-independence era. The long-standing pre-eminence of the genre *gabay* in tackling serious issues has gradually diminished in the post-independence poetry. The once unchallenged position of the genre as the one 'favoured for the handling of serious subjects at a leisurely pace' (Andrzejewski, 1982:102) now seems a thing of the past. In replacement, a number of *beyd-gaab*[31] (short-lined) genres previously overlooked by serious poets have been revived and/or upgraded to supersede the *gabay*, taking over the reins of *maanso-goleed*, the serious poetry of the public forum. The obvious change has prompted a Somali author and poet, Ibraahin Yuusuf Axmed (2003) into declaring that '*Gabaygii wuu Dhintay*', (the *gabay* has died) as a title of a commentary lamenting the diminishing role of the *gabay* genre. In the opening statements of his commentary Ibraahin asserts (in Somali) using a figurative language in an amusing style:

> *Ha la wada ogaado gabaygii in uu dhintay. Ilaahay ha u naxariisto! Kuwa maydkiisa riixaya ee socodka ku khasbaya dadaalkoodu waa hal bacaad lagu lisay. Qayladooda quusta ah*

31 Somalis divide their poetry into the two braod categories of *beyd-dheer* (long-lined) and *beyd-gaab* (short-lined), based on the line length which in turn is based on the number of units of duration in the line called morae. I shall provide a detailed discussion of this and related matters in the next chapter in my description of the rules of Somali versification. Generally speaking, the longer the line is the harder to comply with the rules of metre and alliteration. In the case of the latter the search for alliterative words for a *beyd-dheer* poem is harder than for a *beyd-gaab* one, as we shall see later.

dheg looma jalaq siiyo, waayo xiise looma hayo maydka ay ka maagayaan inay aasaan.

> It should be recognized that the *gabay* has died. The mercy of Allah be upon it! The effort made by those pushing the dead body [of the *gabay*] trying hard to force it to walk gets nowhere. No one listens to their desperate cry because people have lost interest in the dead body they are too reluctant to bury (Ibraahin, 2003:1).

In response to this another author, Cabdulqaadir M. Wacays (2004) confirms that Ibraahin's assertion that the *gabay* has gone out of fashion expresses 'a general feeling increasingly maintained by some of the contemporary commentators of Somali literature and culture'. In a recent television programme on Somali culture a well known collector and commentator of Somali poetry, Axmed Faarax "Idaajaa", has given credence to this comment. He asserts that '*gabaygii waa laga wahsaday. ... Gabayaaga hadda jooga waxaa ku adkaanaysa inuu gabay wax ku tiriyo, waxaa uga fududaanaysa inuu geeraar ku tiriyo ama inuu jiifto ku tiriyo* (The *gabay* has been dispensed with. ... The present-day poet feels it hard to compose in *gabay*; instead, he feels it easier to compose in *geeraar* or *jiifto*)' (Idaajaa, 2012).

Of the short-lined genres which have taken precedence over the *gabay* in the post-independence period, the *jiifto* stands out as the one favoured most. One might conjure to say that the two genres of *gabay* and *jiifto* today symbolise two different eras in Somali literary history: the past and the present, or rather the pre- and post-independence periods. The first was characterised by the undisputed predominance of the *gabay* while the second is featured by the marked preference of the *jiifto*, as will be evident from the forthcoming discussion. This is true to both the *maanso-goleed* and the *hees-casri*, the two major categories of modern Somali poetry. Examples of the other short-lined genres used in place of the *gabay* are the *saar* and a variety of metric forms traditionally reserved for genres belonging to the domain of *hees-hawleed* (work songs). In this section I shall endeavour to substantiate the stated observation, i.e. the shift in the genre preference in post-independence Somali poetic composition. To provide a clearer picture I will start with a brief background describing the position of the genre *gabay* in Somali traditional versification.

3.2.1 Position of the *gabay* in former times

There is not much dispute about the unparalleled paramouncy of the *gabay* genre in Somali traditional poetry. The pre-dominance of the genre has been commented on in the literature on Somali poetry. See, for example, Andrzejewski and Lewis, 1964; Andrzejewski, 1972, 1982; Said, 1982; Orwin, 2000. Professor Andrzejewski, who was renowned for his meticulousness, has estimated that 'perhaps 90 per cent of all classical poetry was composed in this [*gabay*] genre.' (Andrzejewski, 1980: 72). A look into the bulk of classical poems extensively collected over the last sixty or so years confirms Andrzejewski's estimate.

The esteem attached to the *gabay* by traditional Somalis is evident from the fact that people often used, and still use, the word *gabay* to refer not only to this particular genre but to the entire art of serious poetry, or *maanso-goleed*. This is true to even the literary-minded or poets with formal education. In a video-recorded poetry reading event held in Dubai on 2 July 1998, Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac Gaarriye, when introducing the poems he was reciting, uses such expressions as: '*gabayga soo socda*' (the following *gabay*) and '*gabaygani*' (this *gabay*) while in reality none of the poems referred to was *gabay*. In fact most of the verses he referred to were in *jiifto* metre.

This too was the case with the second leading poet in the same event, Bashiir Cumar Good, then Chair of the Council of Camuud University. While only one of the several poems presented by Bashiir was a *gabay*, he refers to almost all of them as '*gabayga*', '*gabaygaas*' and so forth.

This does not mean that these two poet/scholars cannot distinguish between different poetic genres, definitely not so in the case of Gaarriye, the first researcher who in 1976 pioneered the discovery of the rules of Somali *miisaan* (metre) which had previously eluded scholarly observation. His discovery together with that of Cabdullaahi Diiriye Guuleed (Cabdullaahi, 1978) laid the foundation for the measures currently used by students of Somali poetry to classify different genres

and identify their respective metrical structures.

Clearly, Gaarriye is far from being unaware that his famous poem, *Dabataxan* presented in the said event is a *jiifto*, yet in the presentation he refers to it as '*gabaygan*' (this *gabay*), most probably because he was involuntarily carried away by the overwhelming current of the popularly used terminology. The other possibility, which is less likely, is that he might have done so deliberately to simplify things for the benefit of the non-specialist members of his audience. Whichever the case, this is an indication of the scale of the *gabay* influence in Somali culture and frame of mind.

The poets themselves tend to underscore in their verse the importance of the art of the *gabay*. When doing so they use the term *gabay* sometimes to refer to the *gabay* genre in particular and sometimes as a generic name for poetry in general. The poetic excerpt below is a good example illustrating how Somali poets extol the highly esteemed position of the *gabay* in Somali oral culture. A *gabay* itself, this powerful poem was composed in 1991 by Abshir Nuur Faarax "Bacadle". In the main theme of the poem Bacadle welcomes the overthrow of the dictatorial regime of General Siyaad Barre who was just defeated by an opposition front to whom the poet belonged. Before turning to his main theme however Bacadle opens his poem with an *asoosan* (introduction) in which he extols the supreme traits of the *gabay* genre which, in his view, are unparalleled. The excerpt may seem rather lengthy but it is worth citing due to the significance of each line in this context. Its content is self-evident. We only need to note that, being a traditionalist, the poet scorns a number of alternative art forms such as songs, music and dance, which in the past were viewed as much lower in status than the *gabay*. In the traditionalist view of the poet, the genre *gabay* rises not only above the 'worthless sounds of music' and '*heesaha*' (songs), but also above the creative ability of women to 'take considerable part' in it:

Gininiifta iyo muusiggaad, gacal u haysaane
Suugaanta gabaygaa u asal ah, garanna weydeene

Wixii geedka loo xaaraan jirey, gabaygu sow maaha

Waxay odayo goob kaga hadlaan, gabaygu sow maaha
Wixii geela lagu qaybsan jirey, gabaygu sow maaha
Gammaan faras wixii looga tegey, gabaygu sow maaha
Wixii guurka loo dooran jirey, gabaygu sow maaha

Guubaabo iyo nabadgelyaba, gabaygu sow maaha
Guuleed fan-salax waxaan ku gubey, gabaygu sow maaha
Gantaalaha wixii kaga darraa, gabaygu sow maaha.

Tartan wax aanay heesuhu la gelin, gabaygu sow maaha
Wax aan gaadda-ka-cayaar lahayn, gabaygu sow maaha
Wax aan muusig loo gaawinayn, gabaygu sow maaha
Wax aan loo garaacayn gurbaan, gabaygu sow maaha
Wax aan dumarku qayb weyn ka galin, gabaygu sow maaha
Ilaahay wax uu nagu galladay, gabaygu sow maaha.

Murti waxa gorfeeyoo gudbiya, gabaygu sow maaha
Taariikhda waxa lagu guntado, gabaygu sow maaha.
(Bacadle, 1992).

You are enchanted with the worthless sounds of music
Not aware that the pivot of literature is the gabay.

Is the *gabay* not the one for which people assembled under a tree?
Is the *gabay* not the one favoured for elders' debates in higher [traditional] councils?
Is the *gabay* not the one used in sharing camels [among victorious warriors]?
Is the *gabay* not the one exchanged for precious horses?
Is the *gabay* not the one chosen for marriage negotiations?

Is the *gabay* not [the best means for both] incitement to war and peace?
Is the *gabay* not the one I fired at Guuleed Fan-salax?[32]
Is the *gabay* not the one that proved more effective than bullet?

Is the *gabay* not the one which songs cannot compete with?
Is the *gabay* not the one in no need for dance?
Is the *gabay* not the one which dispenses with music and drum-beating?
Is the *gabay* not the one in which women are unable to take considerable part?
Is the *gabay* not that which God favoured us with?

Is the *gabay* not the bearer of wisdom?
Is the *gabay* not the record of history?

The exceptionally esteemed position allocated to this particular poetic genre is not

32 This is the fictional name by which the poet may be referring to General Siyaad Barre whose fresh overthrow at the time was the main theme of the poem.

surprising if one considers its close association with the dominant section of Somali patriarchal society, namely the older men, as apparent from the passage above: 'Is the *gabay* not the one favoured for elders' debate in higher [traditional] councils?'. Serious and hence acclaimed poets for whom the genre was reserved used to be members of the older males who were vested with the highest authority in the community. They were not only the political and economic elite but also the opinion leaders, the shapers of social norms (Said, 1982). Children of both sexes were inculcated with such norms and sets of values according to which female and younger members of the family and the community at large had to obey without question their fathers, husbands and elders in respect and awe, if they were to be considered as righteous members of their society (Said, ibid).

One last piece of evidence showing the pre-eminence of the *gabay* in the old cultural order is that the Somali word for 'poet', '*gabayaa*', is derived from *gabay*. By custom, you were not able to gain the prestigious title of '*gabayaa*' (poet), unless and until you made an extensive and skilful use of this particular genre as the bedrock of your entire poetic craft. You could then utilise other genres as supplementary tools; for instance, a competent oral poet would begin his performance in a *gabay* form. Later in the recital, say after reciting about hundred lines, he would shift to the *masafo* style or sometimes to the *geeraar*, either for variety or to announce a change of subject or mood or for both purposes. The latest great poets who notably represented this established style were Cali Xuseen Xirsi (1913-1976) and Cali Cilmi Afyare (died in 1986).[33]

3.2.2 Emerging precedence of short-lined genres

A close examination of data suggests that since the 1960s Somali poets have tended to turn away from the use of the *gabay* and opt for short-lined alternatives as stated above. Only a small number of the living, significant poets still strive to keep with the use of the *gabay* genre significantly. To my knowledge, Cabdullaahi Macallin

33 Tape recorded collections of poems by both poets are available in my possession. For biographical and bibliographical notes on Cali Xuseen, see Andrzejewski et al, 1985: 388-9; and Antinucci and Axmed, 1986: 105ff. For a profile of Cali Cilmi Afyare and samples of his work see Idaajaa and Khooli, 2001; Boobe, 2008.

Dhoodaan is the only one left alive of the old generation of well known poets who use the *gabay* genre almost exclusively with all its familiar features, see below. The vast majority of the post-independence poets have notably shifted to *beyd-gaab* genres, with the *jiifto* at the forefront. More so in the case of the formally educated and younger poets.

As part of my investigation I discussed the development with over 20 Somali poets in a workshop on Somali poetry held as part of a mother language festival held in Djibouti on 21 – 27 February 2006. Most participants confirmed that they feel it more convenient or easier to use the *jiifto* and other short-lined genres such as the *geeraar* and the *saar*, rather than the *gabay.* Most of the participants, including such well known poets as Maxamed Hadraawi and Mustafa Shiikh Cilmi, expressed the view that *beyd-gaab* genres have become more fashionable because they are less complex in terms of metrical structure; they are also less demanding in the search for alliterative sounds.

For example, with the use of a short-lined genre (the line of which only requires one alliterative sound) it is easier for the poet to survive the arduous task of searching for alliterative words, which many poets find 'un insurmountable obstacle' (Andrzejewski and Lewis, 1964: 43). Supposing you want to compose a poem of five hundred lines, which is very common nowadays, you must find the minimum of one thousand words beginning with the same sound, two words in each line, if you have chosen a long-lined genre, say a *gabay*, whereas you only need half of this much (500 words) in the case of a short-lined genre, such as the *jiifto*, the *geeraar* or the *saar*. Moreover, such alliterative words must have some lexical content; they must be verbs, adjectives, nouns or adverbs.

Another factor behind the shift in genre preference seems to be the changing image of the *gabay* genre as perceived by the new recipients, i.e., the Somali art-lovers who no longer consider the *gabay* as the only, or even the leading prestigious poetic form, as remarked in the above workshop. In the past you were unable to take your seat among significant poets until after many years of competent versification in the pre-determined genre of the *gabay.* Today however this is no more the case. The

best known living Somali poet, Maxamed Warsame Hadraawi, has achieved his fame, as the leading poetic figure in his generation, without bothering to use the once domineering genre, with the exception of a few occasions (see below).

In place of the *gabay*, a wide variety of *beyd-gaab* metrical forms has become fashionable for the composition of Somali post-independence poetry, both *maanso-goleed* and *hees*. These now favoured poetic forms range from the *geeraar*, a distant second to the *gabay* in traditional poetry to such tiny, few-lined genres as those used in lullabies or sung by children in playgrounds or by very young female herders for grazing baby-goats.

One example of turning away from the use of the once esteemed *gabay* form for tackling serious matters, formerly unnoticed genres associated with children are found in the work of Hadraawi again. In structuring a poem entitled *Sirta Nolosha* (Secrets of life) (Hadraawi, 1993: 392), which many consider as Hadraawi's masterpiece, the poet chose the metre of a baby-goat grazing genre (*heesta waxaraha*), chanted by early teenage pastoralist girls addressing their lambs and baby-goats when looking after them.

Addressed to a real teenage girl, Sahra,[34] daughter of the poet's friend, Rashiid Sh. Cabdillaahi, *Sirta Nolosha* is a long poem with a multitude of educational and philosophical themes. The poet uses the format of an experienced man exhorting a young lady, who has just opened her eyes in a dangerous world, on how best to deal with such a world. In reality however, Hadraawi aims to give free rein to his fertile imagination to articulate the way he perceives the world around him.

The line extracted below is the refrain of the poem which repeats at the beginning of each new point and it illustrates the metrical pattern sustained throughout the poem:

Heedhee Sahray heedhe
2 2 1 2 2 1
O Sahra, listen!

34 Sahra currently lives in Britain.

(Hadraawi, 1993:395ff)

As stated above Hadraawi borrows the metre of *heesta waxaraha* which goes as follows:

Waxaraha maxaa qoomay?
1 1 1 1 1 2 2 1
xeeriyo quddaa qoomay!
2 1 1 1 2 2 1
What debilitated the baby-goats?
Xeero and *qudde*[35] debilitated them!

The exemplifying line above from Hadraawi's *Sirta Nolosha* contains ten morae (see above), exactly the same number and the same pattern in each of the two lines from the old *heesta waxaraha*.

The poem's format of addressing a girl of that age may justify Hadraawi's choice of this particular metre, i.e., to sing for the girl in a rhythm familiar to her age-group in a traditional setting, despite the fact that the Sahra he addresses here is in reality a city girl who has no or little idea about pastoral life.

3.2.3 The *jiifto* as the *gabay* successor

Among the rising genres of the *beyd-gaab* category, the *jiifto* unmistakably stands out as the one which dominates the Somali poetic scene of the transitional era, a period that may be described as 'the era of the *jiifto*' as opposed to and successor of 'the era of the *gabay*'. In my view, such a naming is relevant from a historical point of view. Data suggests that we are not wide of the mark if we draw the line between the traditional and transitional periods where the 'era of the *gabay'* hands over and that of the *jiifto* takes off. The findings of my research lead me to believe that such a transition had started to clearly take shape from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s. Hence, given the particular importance of the *jiifto* in this connection I should like to

35 *Xeero* is a wooden platter used to serve traditional food such as maize and rice and *qudde* is a big wooden spoon with which to stir and eat such food. The song critically alludes to the fact that, in times of scarcity of milk, baby-goats are not fed properly because people take away most milk from suckling goats to moisten or dilute their meals of maize, sorghum or similar crops.

focus on it in the forthcoming discussion. The *geeraar* and the *saar* shall be treated, with less emphasis, in various parts of the thesis as deemed relevant. For convenience, I shall approach the position of the *jiifto* in each of the two main terrains of post-independence Somali poetry: the *maanso-goleed* and the *hees-casri*. First however, I must start with an introductory note of clarification in relation to the nature of the *jiifto* as a genre and the difference between it and the *masafo*. An existing confusion between the two genres makes it necessary to provide such a clarification.

3.2.3.1 *Jiifto* or *masafo*?

There is a widespread confusion pertaining to the distinction between the *jiifto* and the *masafo.* Poems structured in the metre of the *masafo* have repeatedly been treated or referred to by scholars as being *jiifto* (see for example, Andrzejewski and Lewis, 1964: 48, 74ff; Andrzejewski, 1982: 102).

Such a confusion could understandably be attributed to the indigenous oral sources that must have informed the works in question. Such informants, who normally are the only sources available to researchers in general and those outside of Somali culture in particular, would reflect the general lack of clarity among many contemporary Somalis about the fact that the *jiifto* and the *masafo* are two different genres, and thus may be unclear as to which of the two a given poem belongs to.

While the origins of and reasons for this confusion are not clear to the present author, its existence is a fact. It exists on both levels of scholarly endeavour and popular discourse. The existence of the problem at the first level is manifest in the work of the late B. W. Andrzejewski. Professor Andrzejewski was a recognised world authority in the study of Somali literature and language. Moreover, Macallin Goosh (the teacher Goosh), as Somalis would like to call him, was renowned for his astonishing meticulousness in his research which is why many, including myself, consider his work as a solid, unparalleled source of reference for students of Somali literature. In spite of all these, the work of Macallin Goosh is not free from the abiding confusion between the two genres of *masafo* and *jiifto*, and this obviously

indicates the extent of the problem.

The otherwise exemplary and ground-breaking work, *Somali Poetry: An Introduction,* by professors Andrzejewski and Lewis (1964), provides us with a clear example illustrating this point. The poem entitled *The Sayid's Reply,* (p. 74ff) is transcribed, translated and described as an example of *jiifto*, while it is actually a *masafo.* See below for a detailed illustration of the difference between the metrical patterns or the line lengths of the two genres. First however I shall discuss some examples starting with the citation of the first stanza of *The Sayid's Reply,* which in fact will provide us with a good example of a classical *masafo*:

> *Ogaadeen ha ii dirin, dacwad baan ka leeyahay*
> *Duul haad Amxaaraa, kaa dooni maayee*
> *Dayntaan ku leeyahay, dun ha iiga qaadine*
> *Wuxuu aniga iga dilo, diyo hayga siinine*[36].
>
> [Concerning your point] 'do not [attempt to] send me to the Ogaadeens' [for compensation],
> I don't ask you for inhabitants of Abyssinian territory.
> Do not claim on my behalf the debts which they owe me.
> Do not give me blood money for whatever they kill [of my men][37]

Shiikh Jaamac Cumar Ciise, another recognised authority in Somali oral history and culture, confirms that this particular piece of poetry is a *masafo*. In his background introduction to the same poem, *The Sayid's Reply*[38], he concludes with the following words:

> *Sayidkuna masafo dheer oo uu ku caddaynayo inuu Ingiriisku musuqmaasuq wado buu mariyey, waana tan:* (Sh. Jaamac, 1974: 79).

36 As part of the universal problem with oral sources, there are several versions of this poem. For instance, there are differences between the version transcribed in Andrzejewski and Lewis (1964) and that published in Jaamac (1974: 79ff). For the purpose of this discussion, I have taken on the line order found in the first source but with some grammatical and linguistic corrections as well as slight changes in the word order to eliminate metrical inconsistencies absolutely uncharacteristic of the Sayid's poetry. These corrections are made in accordance with Sh. Jaamac's version. Also I have adopted the official Somali orthography which was not in place at the time of writing Andrzejewski and Lewis's work. Those interested may compare the two versions.

37 The translation is mine. Cf. Andrzejewski and Lewis, ibid, p.74.

38 The Somali title of the poem is '*Dacwad baan ka leeyahay*' (Jaamac, 1974: 78).

(. . . and the Sayid recited a long *masafo* in which he makes it clear that Britain is using corruption; here is it:)

Sayid Maxamed himself explicitly names his *masafos* as such. One example of this is when he says:

Toljeclaha muraadkaygiyo, masafadayda ula taga
[Sh. Jaamac, 1974: 274).

Take to the Toljecle [clan] my intentions as carried by my *masafo.*

The line comes from a famous *masafo* entitled *Maqashiiya Uunkaba*, (Make it known to the World), one of Sayid Maxamed's many poetic epistles[39] which he often devised in serious political negotiations. Both this *masafo* and the preceding one belong to this type of the Sayid's verse meant to be carried by messengers or special envoys and the Sayid tended to favour the *masafo* form in structuring this type of political poetry.

It should be noted that Sayid Maxamed composed the latter *masafo* in an attempt to seek the support of certain major clans in the northern part of the country, trying to turn them against the British colonial administration. As his chosen format, the poet addresses his two messengers by the name giving them clear instructions right away:

Cabdalla maanqaboobiyo, Xirsi maakiblaawow
1 1 1 2 1 2 1 1 1 1 2 1 2 2
Mid yar waxaad tiraahdaan, murtidiinta Reer Hagar
1 1 1 2 1 2 2 1 1 2 1 2 1 1
Habaryoonis madasheeda, mariya weedha aan iri
1 1 2 1 1 1 2 1 1 1 1 2 1 2 1 1
Toljeclaha muraadkaygiyo, masafadayda ula taga
1 1 1 1 1 2 2 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1
Maqashiiya uunkaba, miyir inuu ku soo galo.
1 1 2 1 2 1 1 1 1 1 2 1 2 1 1

39 For a detailed discussion on Sayid Maxamed's competent use of the technique of poetic epistle see Said, 1982: 149ff.

O, Cabdalla[40] the decent and Xirsi the unequalled
Say a few words to the renegade Reer Hagar [clan]
Deliver my word in an assembly of Habar Yoonis
Take to the Toljecle [clan] my intentions as carried by my *masafo.*
Call upon the whole nation to join us at leisure.

The difference between the *masafo* and the *jiifto*, in terms of metrical structure, is such that leaves no room for any doubt that they are two entirely different genres. The first belongs to the *beyd-dheer* (long-lined) group of genres while the second is a *beyd-gaab* (short-lined) genre. As a matter of fact, the *masafo* line is twice as long as that of the *jiifto.* The length of a *masafo* line is, in most cases, 19 morae, although lines of 18 or 20 morae are not uncommon; on the other hand, a *jiifto* line has 9 morae in most cases, as we have seen earlier (see below too), with the optional possibility of an additional morae in some cases. (For more details, see Cabdullaahi, 1978; Antinucci and Axmed, 1986; Banti and Giannattassio, 1996). This can be examined by comparing the preceding *masafo* lines with the following example of a typical *jiifto*, an excerpt from a popular piece called *Halabuur* (Creativity) by Maxamed Ibraahim Hadraawi:

Hindisaha waxsheeggiyo
1 1 1 1 1 2 1 1
Hoga-galinta jiiftada
1 1 1 1 1 1 2 1 1
Ma hawaawi tiriyee
1 1 2 1 1 1 2
Halka aan furaayaan
1 1 2 1 2 2
U horseed tagaayoo
1 1 2 1 2 2
Horta waan u sahanshaa.
1 1 2 1 1 1 2
(Hadraawi, 1993: 138).

In my creative delivery
In composing my *jiifto*,
I do not mess about;
Instead, I establish a vision
For it beforehand.

40 Cabdalla Shixiri was the name of the first messenger and the second, Xirsi, is believed to be another respected elder by the name of Xirsi Afdiir (Jaamac, 1974: 274).

Here, we note that, like the Sayid to his *masafo*, around three quarters of a century earlier, Hadraawi too refers to his above poem calling it by its genre name, *jiifto* (see the second line) thus leaving no room for any speculations about the genre affiliation of the piece at hand.

However, not all poets are quite clear about the genre affiliations of all their poems. Generally speaking, the Somali tends to be more of an aesthete than analyst when it comes to dealing with poetry (Said, 1982). The major concern of the Somali is with whether or not a given poem is meaningful and beautiful. As John Johnson puts it, asking Somalis to explain the rules of their prosody was 'like asking someone to describe the rules of [their] language' (Johnson, 1979: 119). Cabdulqaadir Cabdi Shube, one of the leading contemporary poets, provides us with an example of the loose use of genre names among many Somalis in contemporary times. In an introduction to a tape recorded collection of his work, Shube refers to one of his most famous poems, *Lama garan* (Not Understood) as '*geeraarakan la yiraahdo "Lama garan",...'*, meaning 'this *geeraar,* called "*Lama garan"...'*, (Shube, 1994), while in reality *Lama garan* is a nice piece of *masafo*, not a *geeraar* at all. The first two lines of the poem go like this:

Geeraarka maansiyo, Allaa gabayga bixiyee
2 2 1 2 1 1 1 2 1 2 1 1 1 2
Gallad weeye tiisoo, in baa lagu gunnaystaye
1 1 2 1 2 2 1 2 1 1 1 2 1 1

The [ability to compose] *geeraar* poems and the *gabay* is a gift from Allah
Only vested in certain privileged persons.

One of the common inaccuracies which have resulted from such a confusion between the two genres of *masafo* and *jiifto*, is observed in the identification of the genres that constitute Somali classical verse in the literature on Somali poetry. It looks like it has been taken for granted that 'there were three main genres in the poetry of the public forum: the *gabay*, the *jiifto* and the *geeraar*' (Andrzejewski, 1982: 72). The *masafo* is always absent from this list of serious poetry, while in fact

it was perhaps the most serious ever of the hitherto identified genres of Somali poetry; it is even more serious than the *gabay* in the sense that the *masafo* is renowned for its emphasis on matters of direct didactic character such as religious preaching and delivering words of wisdom.

One Somali literary commentator, Cabdi Aadan Cabdille "Ceelow",[41] whom I interviewed as part of my data collection, has brought to my attention the and spiritual dimension of the *masafo.* He pointed out, with evidence, that the genre is often favoured by spiritual leaders who used it for delivering messages rising above ordinary matters. In this connection, Ceelow has brought to my attention that in Sayid Maxamed's time and even after, when people wanted to refer to the poems of the poet/nationalist leader, they usually used the expression '*masafooyinkii Sayidka*' (the Sayid's *masafo*s), rather than 'the Sayid's poems' or *gabays*, to attach a higher esteem to the work of the distinguished poet/ spiritual leader, to portray it as something more than just poetry. I have checked this with Shiikh Jaamac Cumar Ciise[42] and he has confirmed it to me.

This also becomes apparent when one considers that most of the classical *masafo* preserved in Somali oral memory are by men of singular stature not only as poets but also as religious leaders and sometimes more, as is the case with Sayid Maxamed Cabdulle Xasan, the poet/sheikh/warrior/political leader. Aside from the Sayid, examples of the best known poet/religious leaders who were renowned for their use of the *masafo* to preach wisdom and religious values are Shiikh Cali Cabdiraxmaan, nicknamed Xaaji Cali Majeerteen, whose fame spread from the town of Marka in the 18th century (see Andrzejewski et al, 1985) and Shiikh Axmed Abiikar "Gabyow", a 19th century poet/sheikh who led the Somali resistance against the Italian occupation in the Benadir region (see Cassanelli, 1982 for more details).

Of Shiikh Cali's poems the few that have survived are not only the oldest found

41 Personal interview, London, 1 July 2008. Himself a poet and collector of oral tradition, Ceelow has astonishingly strong oral memory; he memorises hundreds of Somali oral poems including most of the *masafo*s of the 18th century poet and religious leader, Shiikh Cali Cabdiraxmaan and poems of Sayid Maxamed Cabdulle Xasan which he would recite with relish.

42 Field notes, Djibouti, 4 February 2009.

masafo but also the oldest Somali verses by a known author ever found in the surprisingly short-lived oral memory of the Somalis.[43]

Having treated the prevailing confusion between the *jiifto* and the *masafo* and clarified the nature of the latter, I should like to turn to the description and place of the first, the *jiifto,*in Somali oral tradition as a gateway to the discussion of its new role as a lead genre in the post-independence poetry.

While there is no dispute about the existence of the *jiifto* in Somali oral culture from time immemorial, its origins and strict functions in different times remain a matter for future research.

This said, a close examination of the body of Somali poetic heritage leads us to believe that of the two broad categories of Somali versification, namely the *maanso-goleed* and the *hees*, or serious and light, the *jiifto* traditionally belonged to the latter. Indeed, it comes across that the *jiifto* metrical form used to exist just as *hees-cayaareed* (dance song). The bulk of Somali oral poetry hitherto collected and examined does not give us any samples of *jiifto* used outside the *cayaar* domain, unless one chooses to insist labelling the name 'jiifto' on the *masafo* heritage, a choice I am inclined not to subscribe to, for the reasons detailed above.

A living main source of oral tradition where the use of the *jiifto* structure is paramount is a *cayaar* (dance performance) called *batar*, literally meaning 'talkative.'[44] One of the best known or most popular folklore dances, *batar* is practiced in most Somali pastoral areas, especially in the northern and central regions as well as the Ogaden region in the Somali state of Ethiopia (Sangub, 1992). The poetic component of the *batar* is structured in *jiifto* metrical form. Other

43 The original scripts of several of the *masafo*s by both Shiikh Axmed Gabyow and Shiikh Cali Cabdiraxmaan, together with notes are available in Professor Andrzejewski's collection at the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. Some of these *masafo*s are also in the possession of the present author. For more biographical and bibliographical information about the two great poet/shiikhs, see Andrzejewski et al, 1985: 382, 388. See n.17 for Andrzejewski's remark on the forgetfulness of Somali collective oral memory when it comes to the preservation of oral poetry.

44 For more information about this performance see *Somali Folklore Dance*, Ministry of Information and National Guidance [Somalia], Mogadishu: 1972: 15.

significant elements or non-verbal components of the *batar* include *bootin* (dancing), *sacab* (clapping), and *jaan* (footwork); the latter two are designed to set the pace for the musical rhythm.

Aside from its highly entertaining atmosphere of a festive nature, the *batar* offers a great opportunity for improvised poetic exchanges. It is one of the Somali traditional performances which bring together young men and women, not just to socialise but to engage in endless exchanges of improvisational poetic debate which often include intelligence tests and similar challenges conducted through an amusing competition of verbal eloquence.

Asked by the BBC to explain and illustrate what *batar* is like, Maxamuud Cabdillaahi "Sangub", a famous poet, playwright and foremost folklore dancer, presents the following samples as typical examples of *batar* songs:

A.

Sacab an Doollo lagu qaban
1 1 1 2 1 1 1 1 1
Ama Dabalul iyo Ciid
1 1 1 1 1 1 1 2
Ama dooxadii Sirow
1 1 2 1 2 1 1
Miyuu daawi leeyahay?
1 2 2 1 2 1 1

A *sacab*[45] that is not held in *Doollo*[46]
Or *Dabalul* and *Ciid*
Or the vally of *Sirow*
Is not worth joining.

B.

Sida macawis lowsara
1 1 1 1 1 2 1 1
Layr iyo ilaysba leh
2 1 1 1 2 1 1
Isha lagula wada raac.

45 Literally, *sacab* is clapping, but in connotation it means the whole performance.
46 Doollo, Dabalul, Ciid and Sirow are all the names of places which the poet believes to be ideal for organising a *sacab*.

1 1 1 1 1 1 1 2
(Sangub, 1992).

O lady, like a *lowsar macawis*[47]
Nicely waving and shining
Your beauty turned all heads.

The obvious resemblance in metrical arrangements, the details of which will be discussed below, between the above excerpts and the 2 stanzas from Hadraawi's *Beledweyn* and *Hal-abuur* cited earlier as good examples of the *jiifto* as practiced today unmistakably shows that they do belong to the same genre, the *jiifto*.

Another sample which even more clearly illustrates the *batar jiifto* as practiced over the centuries is given below. It is from a poetic contest between a 19th century poet and dancer, Dhiidhi Kadiye, and a gifted poetess by the name of Geelo[48], in an improvised exchange incorporated in a long-remembered *batar* performance. The piece is in a poetic questioning form meant as an intelligence test, a common style in Somali poetic tradition. In the lines below, Geelo puts four questions to Dhiidhi who promptly answers them one by one:

Geelo: *Waar, gaarida ma garataa?*
Goombaar ma garataa?
Geesiga ma garataa?
Giiryaleyna ma garataa?

Do you know how to tell a good wife?

47 *Macawis* is a traditional male garb, a cotton cloth worn wrapped round the waist that then hangs loosely to the ankles and *lowsar* seems to be the fashionable make at the time.

48 According to sources of oral history, in the first half of the 19th century the chieftain of the Maalinguur clan in the Ogaden region used to hold occasional festivals in his court and as a constant part of the festival a competition was organised in verbal tournaments or poetic duels. The person who won the contest by defeating all other contestants was rewarded by the Sultan who gave him or her the honour of convening the next tournament which took place in some months or a year later. For several years the winner in all contests was a girl called Geelo and the Sultan became concerned that Geelo's unchallenged success could give the impression that women are more intelligent than men. To reverse the situation, he instructed his aides to search for the best poet/performer in the entire Somali territory. Later he was given the name of Dhiidhi Kadiye, from the distant area of Wardheer, as a possible match for Geelo. The Sultan invited Dhiidhi to his court secretly and offered him a generous reward if he won the contest. After several hours of continuous improvised duels exhausted Geelo had to sit down upon her correctly answering Dhiidhi's last question, immediately adding that she had had enough: *Allahaa hadduu Alle yahay* / *Iga aammus baan ku leeyahay!* [If Allah is your Allah / Say no more to mo!]. Thus, Dhiidhi was considered a winner and in the rest of the piece he boasts and celebrates his victory. (Ibraahim Jaamac Garab-yare, fieldnotes, Djibouti, 4 July, 1996; cf. Andrzejewski, 1978.)

Do you know how to tell a slut?
Do you know how to tell a brave man?
Do you know how to tell a coward?

Dhiidhi: *Naa, gaaridana waan garan.*
Waa guudad weyntahay,
Gosha waa xidhxidhataa,
Gadhmadoobihii qabey iyo
Guntaba waa u roontahay
Gacantay is marinaysaad
Geel-waaqis mooddaa,
Gaaridu bal waa taa.

Goombaarna waan garan:
Waa ganacyo weyntahay,
Gosha waanay xidhanayn
Gadhmadoobihii qabey iyo
guntaba waa u daran tahay.
Aqalkeeda guradiisaad
Geel xeradi mooddaa.

Geesigana waan garan. ...

I can tell a good wife:
She has big and neat tresses,
She tidily wraps her waist around;
To the black-bearded man, her husband,
And to the clan leaders she is generous;
The hand with which she washes her body
You might mistake for a *geelwaaqis* flower.
That is what a good wife is like!

I can tell a slut:
She is fat under her ribs,
She cannot wrap her waist tidily;
To the black-bearded man, her husband,
And to the clan leaders she is unkind;
The sleeping recess of her house
You might mistake for a camel pen.
I can tell a slut!

I can tell a brave man. . . .[49]

It is manifest in many parts of this long exchange that verses in *jiifto* metrical form

49 Translated in Andrzejewski, 1978: 93-4. A typescript containing the full text of the exchanges is in my possession. For more information, including the background to the poetic contest, see Maxamed Xaaji, 1976.

were used in an extremely entertainment-oriented manner giving free rein to the poet's uncensored follow of imagination. In a typical dance evening, stimulated young poets/dancers in a festive mood would improvise their *jiifto*s to converse with their partners from the opposite sex sometimes using sexually explicit language. For instance, Geelo in one of her riddles puts to Dhiidhi a question about his knowledge of the art of love making; of course, she could not be direct in her wording. Like other Somali poets and orators she skilfully uses figurative language and word play which nevertheless could be deciphered by her contestant. To outdo his female combatant from the point of view of a man challenged by a woman in such a sensitive arena, Dhiidhi gives her a detailed word graphics of what he would do step-by-step if the two of them went to bed together that night.

I have deliberately cited this example in rather lengthy detail to support my argument that, contrary to the view held by some who mistake *masafo* for *jiifto*, the latter as a metrical form was traditionally used to compose light poetry meant for entertainment and not for serious poetry or *maanso-goleed*.

One final remark about the comparison and contrast between the *jiifto* and the *masafo* is that the *masafo* line sounds like or is equivalent to a *jiifto* couplet, in terms of metrical arrangements. This may be the reason why some people refer to the two genres interchangeably. Aside from this, the two genres have traditionally been wide apart in four important aspects, namely in metrical structure, purpose, contextual setting and the type of their practitioners. The *masafo* is a *beyd-dheer* genre, used to deliver a very serious message of religious, philosophical or political nature, composed by a sole older man, in a sober diction. This has already been illustrated in the examples taken from the work of Sayid Maxamed and Shiikh Cali Cabdiraxmaan. Conversely, the *jiifto*, as found in traditional performances, was often practised by young men and women in a participatory mode within a gathering of youths entertaining themselves with the aim of engaging in a poetic conversation to express themselves in a relaxed manner. Metrically, the *jiifto* is a *beyd-gaab* genre; its line is just as short as a *masafo* half-line, as illustrated earlier.

The question that arises here is when did the *jiifto* begin to leave its traditional

confines as a dance song and over-ride the once domineering genre of the *gabay* in dealing with serious issues of modern life. The findings of my research lead me to believe that the development started in the early 1960s, immediately after independence. According to Maxamuud Ismaaciil "Xudeydi", a leading poet/musician, and one of the poets of the older generation who extensively use the *jiifto* for the modern song, '*jiiftadu xornimaday dib ula dhalatay'* (the *jiifto* was reborn with independence). (Xudeydi, 2011). He told me, in an interview in London, that it was 1961 (a year after political independence) that he composed his first poem using the *jiifto* metrical form. Further evidence supporting Xudeydi's statement above will be considered later in this discussion.

In the two sub-sections that follow, I shall discuss the extent of the shift to the use of the *jiifto* in post-independence poetry through the examination of the range of use of the genre in each of the two main domains of Somali post-independence poetry: the *maanso-goleed* and *hees-casri*.

3.2.3.2 The *jiifto* takes the lead: the case of the public forum poetry (*maanso-goleed*)

In chapter 2 I defined my use of the concept *maanso-goleed* or the public forum poetry; I have described it as a poetry created as a separate literary entity composed by an individual, known poet to deal with serious matters of a social, political or philosophical nature. It is so named to distinguish it from other types of poetry composed as part of a multi-component art form, such as the *hees*. I have also pointed out that the genre preference for this type of poetry has shifted in the post-independence period from the *gabay* to a number of *beyd-gaab* genres with the *jiifto* in the lead. To substantiate this I shall present clear evidence of marked preference of the *jiifto* in two major areas; namely, the work of the best known, living, post-independence poets and the most popular poetic forums for the creation of modern *maanso-goleed* in the said period. Such forums are represented by a literary practice called *silsilad* or *gabay-ku-dood* (poetic debate), a well established tradition in Somali cultural life past and present. (See below).

The work of Maxamed Ibraahim Hadraawi provides us with exemplary evidence in

this respect. Earlier in this discussion, I have asserted that while in the past one could not be recognised as a significant poet without making extensive use of the *gabay* genre, Maxamed Hadraawi has achieved his nation-wide acclaim without paying attention to the once domineering genre. It is interesting to note that over ninety percent of Hadraawi's oeuvre is *jiifto* poem*s* and not *gabay*s. Of the 63 poems contained in his major collection, *Hal-karaan* (1993) the vast majority of 51 (around 90%) are *jiifto*s. Only three poems out of the 63 are composed in the *gabay* metre; these three poems are *Durdur, Galangal* and *Gudgude*.

Here, it is important to add that Hadraawi is far from being an exceptional case in his marked preference for the *jiifto* to compose modern *maanso-goleed*. In fact almost all significant transitional poets of the modernist group share with him the same preference for the *jiifto.* The well known poets Maxamed Xaashi Gaarriye, Xasan Ganey, Siciid Saalax, to name but a few, are fine examples. Their increasing reliance on the *jiifto* will become evident shortly from our discussion of the poetic debates of *Siinley* and *Deelley* in which all the above poets were among the leading participants. For instance, the *diiwaan* (collection of poems) entitled *Hagarlaawe* which carries almost all significant poems by the acclaimed poet, Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac "Gaarriye" (2007) contains 48 poems of which only four are in the *gabay* form whereas an overwhelming majority of 30 poems are in *jiifto*. Most of the rest are in other *beyd-gaab* metrical forms, notably the g*eeraar* and the *saar*, as well as a number of lesser known forms derived from Somali oral tradition (see Gaarriye, 2007).

Axmed Faarax Cali "Idaajaa" and Ibraahim Cawad "Khooli" explain an important reason for the unusual precedence of the *jiifto* over the *gabay* in modern times,

> *Miisaanka gaaban ee jiiftadu wuxuu noqday fursad wacan oo ay dhallinta indheergaratada ahi kaga qayb-galaan doodaha suugaanta oo ku marriiman murtida Soomaalida*.
> (The *jiifto's* short line has offered a good opportunity to young intellectuals to participate in literary debates which carry the Somali wisdom) (Idaajaa and Khooli, 2001:7).

My research leads me to conclude that the transition from the era of the *gabay* to

that of the *jiifto* or in other words from the pre-dominance of the *gabay* to the obvious precedence of the *jiifto* was marked by the release of a poetic series (*silsilad*) called *Siinley* in 1972. *Siinley* represented a modern continuation of a long-established literary tradition in Somali society called *silsilad* (literally chain). It is also called *gabay-ku-dood* meaning poetic debate, a series of poems exchanged by a number of poets debating a specific issue of common concern. Such *silsilad*s frequently, every couple of years or so, in normal times, (times of sweeping upheavals excepted) and become the main current or the most spoken-of literary happening of the time. Traditionally, they used to take the form of poetic exchanges which are

> either conducted directly at an assembly, with the contestants present , or consist of a series of polemical poems, recited on different occasions, in different places; in the latter case, they are carried by messengers and travellers who learn them by heart (Andrzejewski and Galaal, 1963:16).

In former times contesting poets often represented clan rivalry, each poet acting as the spokesman of his clan. Traditionally, one of the main features of a significant *silsilad* was that it must be in the *gabay* form and follow the same alliteration and metre, although deviation from the latter two rules was not uncommon.

In pre-independence times one of the best known and best documented *silsilad*s was a series called *Guba* (The One that Burns), so named because of its inflammatory character. A famous poet, Cali-Dhuux Aadan, started the verbal combat in 1922 (Said, 1982) with an acrimonious poem, entitled '*Doqonkii Ogaadeen ahaa*', (The Ogaadeen[50] Fools). In response, over 12 contestants took part in the heated duels as the attack and counterattack carried on for years (Shiikh Jaamac Cumar Ciise, Field notes, Djibouti, 12 October 2004). Among the participants were such very famous literary figures as Qamaan Bulxan, Salaan Carrabey and Ismaaciil Mire, each of them representing the position of his clan in a political and territorial dispute which raged between the northern Somali clans of *Ogaadeen*, *Isaaq* and *Dhulbahante*, to which the three poets belonged respectively. For more details about the *Guba* series

50 Ogaadeen is one of the major clans in Western Somalia and Eastern Ethiopia.

and the tradition of *gabay-ku-dood* in general, see Andrzejewski and Galaal, 1963; Said, 1982, 1989; and Maxamed Xaaji, 1976.

In the post-independence era, the tradition continued but not without significant changes in some of its major aspects. The one change which is most relevant in the context of the current study was that the *jiifto* has replaced the *gabay* as the genre favoured for the composition of the poems of a poetic debate (*silsilad*). A second change was that participating poets no longer associated themselves with their respective clans, except for one particular case, the case of a series called *Hurgumo* (Festering Wound) initiated by the late Khaliif Shiikh Maxamuud in 1978. (See below for details). As mentioned above this new shift was marked for the first time by the poetic series *Siinley* in 1972-73. This series is one of three poetic debates which emerged in the post-independence era which I shall discuss as sources of evidence supporting my central arguments that Somali post-independence poetry is an art in transition and that, as a facet of such transition, the *jiifto* has taken precedence over the *gabay* in the modern poetry of the public forum. The other two series are *Deelley* (1979-80) and *Doodwanaag* (2004). From a historical point of view and for the purpose of this thesis, *Siinley* is of particular importance, as we shall see shortly. The name of the series, *Siinley*, means the one with *siin*, so-called because all the poems of the series alliterate in *s*, in Somali *siin*, a loan word from Arabic. Metrically, all the poems are structured in the *jiifto* metre. For the texts of the series together with comments (in Somali) see Fu'aad, 2011.

This poetic series comprises 33 poems composed by 20 poets in a time frame of 10 months. (Idaajaa and Khooli, 2001:7). As described by one of its lead participants, Siciid Saalax, *Siinley* came as 'unplanned poetic exchanges which began in the form of light-hearted poetic messages between friends, with no specific thematic focus.' (Siciid,1992). It evolved from a number of tape-recorded poetic messages exchanged by two friends, Maxamed Ibraahim Hadraawi and Cabdi Aadan Qays, who lived in Mogadishu and Djibouti respectively (Boobe, 2008: 371). It was then taken on by a number of young teachers who graduated from Lafoole College of

Education shortly before the emergence of the series. The initiation of *Siinley* and the shortness of its metre inspired and gave opportunity to young graduates, previously unknown as poets, who constituted the majority of the participants (Fu'aad, 2011:2; Idaajaa and Khooli, 2001:7). The emerging poets were also stimulated by the general atmosphere of the time, a time characterised by a general sense of rejuvenation and literary flourishing referred to as '*beri-samaadkii fanka iyo suugaanta Soomaalida*' [the golden era of Somali art and literature] (Maxamed Daahir, 1987: 55ff). This was heightened by the introduction in 1972 of an official orthography for writing the Somali language for the first time, a development which is considered as an historical landmark in Somali cultural life.

Cautious about the strict censorship of the military regime of the time, the poets used a technique known as *sarbeeb*, a veiled language indirectly critical of the emerging dictatorial tendency of the then new military government.

From a historical point of view, the emergence of *Siinley* represented important cross-roads in the development of Somali poetry in transition. It was an innovative development in a number of important aspects. In content it was the first known *silsilad* in Somali poetic history that deviated from the established theme of clan-based contest. In form it was the first forum of *maanso-goleed* where the transitional innovation of the preference of short-lined genres over the *gabay* was used in such a participatory manner with remarkable success. In other words, *Siinley* was the first poetic series in which all participants ventured to turn away from the use of the g*abay* and opt for the *jiifto*, an historic precedence the influence of which was set to be reflected in the poetic debates that emerged ever since (see below). Another innovation was that little known poets belonging to the educated elite initiated and successfully managed, for the first time, a *silsilad* of this scale using cassette tapes to transmit it. While all previous popular *silsilad*s were transmitted by word of mouth *Siinley* participants successfully used the magnetic tape; the entire series was tape-recorded one by one and circulated through the audio cassette.

Around six years later, these innovations that featured *Siinley* were reflected in another, more influential *silsilad* called *Deelley*,[51] meaning the one with *deel*, so called because all the poems in the series alliterate in *d*, in Somali *deel*, derived from the Arabic *daal*. Like *Siinley*, all the poems of *Deelley* were structured in *jiifto*. Launched in December 1979, *Deelley* was set to outdo *Siinley* in terms of participation, number of poems, outreach, influence and popularity. (See Rashiid Sheekh, 2008 below). In Deelley some fifty poets engaged in a heated poetic debate which raged for about five months. (Hadraawi, 2008: 52). Rashiid Sheekh Cabdillaahi identifies a number of important aspects in which *Deelley* was unique as a nation-wide literary forum:

> *Waxaa ka qayb qaatay maansoyahanno aad uga tiro badan kuwa silsilad kasta oo kale ka qayb qaatay. Tirada maansoyahaka (sic) waxaa ku xidhan tirade (sic) maansooyinka oo Deelley silsilad kasta oo kaleba kaga tagtay oo ay si weyn uga durugtay. Maansoyahannada tiriyey Deelley waxay ahaayeen kuwo ka soo jeeda ama kala joogey, marka ay soo maansoonayeen, badanka dhulka Soomaalidu degto iyo meelo dibadda ka mid ahba. Deelley waxay yeelatay oo ay silsiladaha kale, xataa Siinley oo ay waxyaalo wadaagaan, dheertahay saamaynta ugu ballaadhan uguna qota fog ee ay dareenka iyo wacyiga dadka ku yeelatay. Baaxadda fiditaankeeda la yaabka lahaa iyo xiisaha ay abuurtay.* (Rashiid, 2008:71).
>
> (More poets than in any other series participated in *Deelley*. Similarly, *Deelley* outnumbered by far all other *silsilad*s in the number of the poems it contained. The series was participated in by poets who lived at the time throughout the Somali territories as well as abroad. The extent and the depth of the impact of *Deelley* in the feelings and awareness of the general public were unparalleled in any other *silsilad*, including *Siinley* with which *Deelley* has a number of similarities. The range of its circulation and the public interest it generated were also astonishing).

One of the two acclaimed poets who initiated the series, Maxamed Ibraahim Hadraawi, explains the goal of this poetic initiative as being, '*inay noqoto forum, inay noqoto baaqii midaynta codka ummadda*, to provide a forum for the united

51 For an explanation of how and why this *silsilad* emerged, given by the poet who initiated it, see Gaarriye, 2007: 35-6.

voice of the nation. (Hadraawi, 2008: 61).

The vast majority of significant Somali poets of the time had taken part in the poetic combat, which also attracted the participation of a good number of new poets who were motivated to put their young talents to test for the first time (Idaajaa and Khooli, 2001:7).

The series had one unified, major theme revolving around the evils of clannism as practiced by the ruling elite. The central question was who was to be held responsible for the re-emergence of the old social ills. Two groups of poets represented the two sides of the debate. The first had pointed an accusing finger to the government as responsible for the return of the growing clan sentiments and clan-based injustice while the second group attempted to either defend the position of the government or identify more profound elements in the innermost part of the Somali social fabric that could have nourished such negative sentiments. More detailed description of the different aspects of *Deelley* is beyond the scope of this thesis. For more detailed discussion of various aspects of this series see Idaajaa and Khooli, 2001; Boobe, 2008; Hawd, 2012.

What we are concerned with here are the implications of this monumental literary development in relation to the new trends of transitional poetry in post-independence Somalia. In this connection, two important points need to be made. The first is that the *Deelley* Movement and its aftermath represented the centre stage of Somali poetic life in the realm of *maanso-goleed* for a prolonged period of time, until the outbreak of the civil war in 1990. The second and most important point is that the bulk of the poems which made up the literary forum of such magnitude and national significance, were exclusively *jiifto* poems, while the once dominant *gabay* had no room in the poetic discourse of this seriousness. This was a significant pointer indicating that things have changed. This made the *jiifto* takeover of the *maanso-goleed* a reality obvious to all. In the past the use of the *jiifto* in a *silsilad* (poetic series) of this scale of seriousness and influence had been just unthinkable.

Given the magnitude of its popularity, as well as its close association with the major

common concern of the Somali public of the time, the *Deelley* style became a model for the new generation of Somali *maanso-goleed* composers. The marked preference of the *jiifto* was the principal characteristic feature of this favourite model. Other characteristics which have been modelled by *Deelley* and more prominently featured in the transitional public forum poetry ever since include the precedence of political themes, avoidance of unnecessary introductions, deviation from the use of the melodic chant (*luuq*) and a noted inclination towards thematic unity lacking in previous poetic combats . The texts of all the poems which make up *Deelley* series, together with an elaborate introduction in Italian and Somali, are found in Idaajaa and Khooli, 2001. Another version of the collection with a different introduction is also available in Boobe, 2008.

The new trend of *beyd-gaab* takeover and the *jiifto* precedence in *maanso-goleed* has continued through to this new millennium; it has even extended to the Somali diaspora among the younger generation of emerging poets using the internet as a medium of transmission in place of the audio cassette, which, since the early 1970s had replaced the traditional oral medium. The case of a series called *Doodwanaag* (Graceful Debate) illustrates the above statement.

This *silsilad* was initiated by a young Somali poet and architect by the name of Maxamed Cali Cibaar who was studying in the Netherlands at the time. In May 2004 he published electronically a new poem called *Dawo* (Cure) through which he called upon young poets of his generation to help restore peace and normalcy in their homeland using their art. He makes it clear within the poem that his intention is to initiate a debate among his peers, the educated members of the young generation, addressing them as '*Inta ila da'daayee*' 'those of my age' (see below). He then announces his intention as follows:

> *Dan baan maanta leeyahay*
> *Dood baanan furayaa*
> *Daa'in hayla garab galo.*
> I have intent today
> I am opening up a debate
> May God help me with it. (Maxamed, 2004).

He then gets down to the bottom line of his message, after introductory lines:

> *Deelleey dhasheediyo*
> *Doodwanaag ma tirinnaa?*
> *Danyar ma u hibeynaa?*
> *Dulman ma ugu baaqnaa?*
> *Runta lama daboolee*
> *Diirka mawga qaadnaa?* (ibid).
>
> Shall we engage in a graceful debate?
> Descendant of *Deelley?*
> Shall we dedicate it to the poor?
> Shall we make it the voice of victims of injustice?
> Truth should not be disguised
> Shall we unveil it?

The young poet surprisingly succeeded to get his message across in no time. He received a very quick and positive response from the particular people he meant to communicate with via the internet: 'those of my age'. 28 young poets from around the world were prompted to participate in the new *silsilad* which Maxamed named (within his poem) *Doodwanaag, 'doodwanaag ma furannaa?* [Shall we engage in a graceful debate?]*'* (ibid). Their prompt response was 'yes' and they came together in what Abdislam (2008) calls 'an electronically assisted literary forum' (p. 14). The result was 50 new poems, all complying with the pre-determined conditions of the unity of alliteration, metre and theme. (See Abdisalam, 2008: 15).

It is interesting to note that the majority of the participants were emerging poets from the diaspora with no previous experience as poets. Presumably, the use of a short-lined metrical form (*jiifto*) helped them to easily compose quality new poems, thus attesting to Idaajaa and Khooli's assertion that 'The *jiifto's* short line has offered a good opportunity to young intellectuals to participate in literary debates' (2001:7).

A close look at the *Doodwanaag* series leads to a number of important conclusions. First, it is apparent that Somali poetry maintains its renowned power and appeal to younger generations, even to those in the diaspora who live in a new environment and are exposed to different cultural experiences. The second observation is the continuation and increase of the marked preference of the *jiifto* even in the new

poetry created by young, emerging poets in the diaspora. Third, three fresh innovations adding to the transitional aspects of post-independence poetry are observed in *Doodwanaag*. The first is the shift in the mode of poetry transmission from the use of the cassette in past decades to that of the internet at present (Abdisalam, 2008: 14).The second fresh innovation is the use of writing for the first time in creating and circulating a poetic series (ibid: 17). The third innovation in *Doodwanaag* is what we can call global participation. It is the first time that a Somali poetic forum or a Somali poetic *silsilad* brings together participants from all around the world; This is made possible by the existence of large Somali communities in the diaspora, mainly in Europe and North America, following the exodus of people fleeing the civil war which broke out in 1991.

Another important observation is that *Doodwanaag* keeps with the new trend modelled by *Siinley* and consolidated by *Deelley*. The most paramount feature of this model is the replacement of the *gabay* by the *jiifto* as a favourite genre for structuring a poetic series. Other features include thematic unity focusing on current affairs and broad participation on the part of the educated class.

3.2.3.3 The *jiifto* takes the lead: the case of the modern song (*hees-casri*)

The second arena where the increasing precedence of the *jiifto* over other genres is clearly observed is the modern song or *hees-casri*, which has its origins in the miniature songs of *belwo* and *heello* which emerged and developed from the early 1940s to the late 1950s, as discussed in the preceding chapter. Examining the lyrics of that period, we can see that the *wiglo/dhaanto* metrical structure was the one exclusively used in the composition of the early modern songs. Poems in the *Wiglo* family[52] tend to be constructed in couplets and its line contains 12-14 units of

52 As mentioned earlier in chapter 3, this family, consisting of the *wiglo*, the *dhaanto* and the *hirwo*, is classified by Johnson as 'the family of miniature genres' (Johnson, 1996b: 27ff), so named because of the brevity of its poems. Johnson also includes in this family the *belwo*, which shares with them the aspects of brevity and metrical form. However, *belwo* defers from members of this family in other important aspects. The *wiglo*, the *dhaanto* and the *hirwo* all come from traditional, pastoral oral culture practised from time immemorial. They belong to Andrzejewski's category of 'time-free stream' (Andrzejewski et al, 1985). In most part, they are associated with traditional dance performances, more so in the case of the *dhaanto*. Conversely, the *belwo* was a relatively recent development associated with modern times. In Andrzejewski's time-based

duration in most cases.[53] Given below is a traditional *wiglo* couplet giving us a picture of the physical appearance of the poems of the genre, as well as their metrical structure which is also shared by the early modern song in the form of *belwo* and *heello* or *qaraami*:

Allow mid daruur ah, oo dahab u eg
1 2 1 1 2 1 2 1 1 1 1
Allow yaa dadab, la jiifsada.
1 2 2 1 1 1 2 1 1
(Maxamed, 1989: 186)
I wish I could share a bed with a girl
As attractive as gold.[54]

Note the metrical similarity between this *wiglo* and the *dhaanto* lines cited in chapter 2. Likewise, the following couplet, extracted from what Johnson (1996) describes as 'one of the most famous of all Cabdi's [*belwo*] poems' (Johnson, 1996:55), is a good example of the poetic form, *balwo*. The poet referred to here is Cabdi Deeqsi "Cabdi Sinimow", the founder of the *balwo* in northern Somalia in the early 1940s. The metrical resemblance between this *balwo* and the above *wiglo* is quite obvious:

Haddii quruxdaada layga qarshoy
1 2 1 1 2 1 2 1 1 2
Qadiija Belwoy qac baan odhan
1 2 1 1 2 1 2 1 1

If your beauty were hidden from me,
O, Qadiija Belwo[55], I [would] break [in two] (ibid).

---

categorisation, it perfectly matches the 'time-bound stream'. Unlike in the other three, the *belwo* used love as its central theme and it is composed by known poets. More information about these poetic forms is found in Andrzejewski's pioneering article 'The art of the miniature in Somali poetry', *African Language Review*, (1967), pp.5-16. The reason why I have given precedence to the *wiglo* in anmin gthe family is because it is believed that 'the *wiglo* is the oldest' (Johnson 1996b: 27).

53 A systematic investigation of this particular metric pattern is yet to be undertaken.

54 For details on the *wiglo* and its metamorphosis into *hirwo* then *dhaanto*, *belwo* and *heello*, together with sung samples of each, listen to Cabdullaahi Qarshi, 1985, 1995; Cumar Dhuule 1996; and Sangub, 1992.

55 Qadiija Belwo is the nickname of Khadiija Ciye Dharaar, the only female member of the group of artists who formed around Cabdi Sinimow to practise and promote the new art of *belwo* songs in the Somali towns of Boorama and Seylac.

Such exclusive use of the *wiglo* metre in structuring the new song had continued throughout the era of the *qaraami* or *heello*, which extended to the late 1950s. This becomes apparent from looking at the abundance of *heello* texts available either on numerous tape recordings[56] or in collections such as Johnson, 1996 and Mohammed Sh. Hassan, 2000. The following stanza, from the late 1950s, is one of the most popular *heello* poems ever:

Had mooye habaarba looma dhintee
1 2 1 1 2 1 2 1 1 2
Haadduna subaxdii hortay ma kacdee
2 1 1 1 1 2 1 2 1 1 2
Aniyo hilbahaygii kala hoyannee
1 1 1 1 1 2 2 1 1 1 1 2
Laba isu hilooba hayga hadhee
1 1 1 1 1 2 1 2 1 1 2
Hammoy beena sow tan lay helay.
1 2 2 1 2 1 2 1 1

Unless the appointed time for death [comes]
One does not die for a curse;
No bird of prey wakes before me in the morning
My flesh is becoming separated from me
Let me abandon the [feeling of] sincerity
Which two people [can] have for each other
O, false hope, [grief] has found me.

Later in the development, from the beginning of the 1960s onwards, which coincides with the beginning of the post-independence period, the use of a variety of metric patterns belonging to various poetic genres began to replace the exclusive use of the *wiglo* metre in the composition of the *hees-casri* (modern song). One prominent feature common to most of these now favoured poetic genres is the shortness of their lines compared with the previously favoured *wiglo* metre. Among these *beyd-gaab* genres that were taking precedence in composing *hees-casri*, three came to the fore, namely, the *jiifto*, the *geeraar* and the *saar*, the same genres favoured for the modern *maanso-goleed* (see above). Of the three however, the *jiifto* was gradually gaining preference until its paramountcy in this second field (*hees-casri*) became indisputable by the late 1970s and early 1980s.

56 Many of these are in my possession on audio cassettes.

The pattern of these changing trends can be discerned by comparing a set of representative sample songs from the sixties with another produced in more recent years. Taking our clue from Johnson once again, most of the texts contained in his extensive collection provide an excellent cross section of examples from the sixties, the period immediately after political independence. A look at the abundant examples cited in Johnson (1996: 117ff), under the heading 'The Heello: Period Three', leads us to arrive at two significant conclusions. First, with the coming of political independence came what we can call a prosodic independence of the modern song from the two-decade-old dominance of the *wiglo beyd-dheer* metre. The change is quite apparent from the contrast between the songs illustrated in the earlier chapters of Johnson's book cited as belonging to the 'Heello: Period One' and 'Heello: Period Two' (p. 75ff) and those placed under 'Heello: Period Three' (p.117ff). While the songs under the first two periods have all a unified metre, namely the *wiglo* family metre, each song belonging to 'Period Three' has its own distinct metrical form and none of them uses the *wiglo* metre.

Second, the *jiifto* was the least paramount among the multitude of genres used which seem to had begun to compete in replacing the retreating *wiglo* metre. This rather obscure position of the *jiifto* at this stage is not surprising if one considers that the genre was 'just being re-born with the birth of independence', as Xudeydi puts it (see above).

Out of 15 sample songs, cited in Johnson's 'Heello: Period Three' (immediately after independence) only two are structured in *jiifto*, which means a percentage of just 13%. In search for more evidence, I was able to investigate over thirty additional songs contained in randomly chosen tape recordings from the sixties. The result was more or less the same: 12-13%.

To investigate the extent of the change that has been taking place over the last decades in *hees-casri* genre preference, I have examined forty songs from the popular releases of the last three decades. Again, the selection was random and the result was a surprise: in stark contrast to the songs of the sixties, over sixty percent

of the lyrics composed and set to music in the period of 1980s-2000s are *jiifto* verses. The *saar* is a distant second and most of the remaining lyrics are *geeraar*, with some negligible exceptions associated with other metrical forms.

In an effort to collect data from this period I have targeted two significant sources. The first is representative sample collections of highly popular songs sung by famous singers who became favourite stars in the last two decades, and the second is a wide collection of songs published in a book form. To examine the first source I have looked at two sets of sample collections, one from the 1990s and the other from the 2000s. Each set comprises two popular "albums"[57] separately sung solo by two famous singers, a male and a female. From the 1990s I have selected an album called *Dalxiis*[58] by Cabdijabaar Xaaji Cali (male singer) and another entitled *Jabaq* by Nimco Yaasiin Carraale (female). The first collection, *Dalxiis*, contains eight popular songs six of which are structured in *jiifto*. The other collection, *Jabaq*, has nine songs of which five have *jiifto* lyrics and the remaining four are in *saar* metre.

The marked preference for the *jiifto* is even more apparent in the two representative collections from the 2000s. The first "album", *Xilo*, by Maxamed Xasan "Lafoole", who is perhaps the most popular star with the young generation at the time of writing, comprises 12 songs, nine of which are versified in *jiifto*. (Lafoole, 2006). More significantly, in the second collection, *Caqli*, by Sahra Halgan (female star) nine songs out of ten are in *jiifto*. This collection is available online at heesta.com,[59] a Somali website specialising in the collection and storage of Somali music.

To further examine the span of the new development of *jiifto* dominance in the field of *hees-casri* or modern song, I have navigated the huge body of songs produced in the two preceding decades of the 1970s-80s. The result has reaffirmed the increasing

57 The word 'album' here is a recent neologism that has come into everyday speech among Somalis, apparently as a Western influence. The popular use of the word, to refer to a collection of recorded music has spread in recent decades which have witnessed the greatest exposure to Western cultures following the exodus of Somalis fleeing the civil war to Western countries.

58 All the non-print collections referred to here are on cassette/CD/DVD recordings available in most Somali music shops in London, Djibouti and elsewhere.

59 http://www.heesta.com/fanaan.php?fanaan=162, visited on 28 May 2012.

precedence of the *jiifto* over other genres throughout the last couple of decades. One of the useful sources I have used was Mohammed Sh. Hassan's three volume collection, which is considered as the most extensive published source containing full texts of Somali modern songs. In volume three alone Mohammed Sh. Hassan (2000) has collected 195 songs, most of them from among the most popular songs of the last couple of decades. The majority are from the 1970s-80s storage. The collector gives especial attention to the favourite pop songs sung by very famous female stars. One of these top singers is Khadra Daahir Cige, who is considered by many as the most famous female star from the 70s and 80s generation. The examination of the metrical structures used in the repertoire of Khadra's songs collected in Mohamed's *Diiwaanka Heesaha, Caddadka Saddexaad*, (Mohamed Sh. Hassan, 2000) gives us a clear indication of the genre preference in composing the Somali song of the 70s and 80s.

In this collection we find 25 famous songs sung by Khadra throughout the two decades; the lyrics are composed by some 16 top poets and famous song writers of different ages, such as late Maxamed Cumar Huryo, Cabdulqaadir Xirsi "Yamyam", Cabdi Aadan "Qays", Maxamed Cali Kaariye, Maxamuud Cabdullaahi "Sangub", Maxamuud Tukaale and many others. It is interesting to note that out of Khadra Daahir's 25 *hees*es transcribed in the collection, 16 are in *jiifto*s. (See Mohammed Sh. Hassan, 2000: 188-218 for the texts). This means that the *jiifto* lead of over sixty percent has been sustained throughout the past three decades. Such is the general trend found in almost all the songs from the last decades contained in Mohammed Sh. Hassan's collection.

It is apparent from the data presented above that the modern song too has joined the *maanso-goleed* in its increasing preference of *beyd-gaab* genres, predominantly the *jiifto*. This attests to the over-riding popularity of this genre as the lead structural form that features the overall phenomenon of Somali transitional poetry which coincides with the post-independence period.

In the preceding discussion on the changing poetic trends I have elucidated that the Somali post-independence poetry is in a state of transition. One area in which such a

transition is manifest is genre preference. The transition is evident in the relatively recent shift from the traditionally favoured use of the *gabay* to the emerging marked preference of the *jiifto*. The general trend is an obvious shift from the use of long-lined genres, such the *gabay*, the *masafo* and the *wiglo*, to short-lined ones such as the *jiifto*, the *geeraar* and the *saar*. The *masafo* and the *wiglo* have virtually disappeared. The *gabay* too seems to be gradually shrinking, giving way to the *jiifto* and other *beyd-gaab* genres, although it has not yet disappeared completely. Abdulfatah Al-hakeemi argues that 'old aspects of form have to either adjust themselves to fit the measurements of the time or give way to new alternative ones' (Al-hakeemi, 1986: 88). In the experience of Somali versification, the first option seems to have been the case. Aspects of form of Somali post-independence poetry seem to be 'adjusting themselves' to the requirements of modern times. Rather than innovating new poetic form(s) or structures belonging to the new times, Somali transitional poets have revived or upgraded the *jiifto* whose roots fade into the penumbra of unrecorded time, making it the successor of the shrinking *beyd-dheer* genres, not only in the light-hearted realm of *hees*, where the *jiifto* originally belonged, but in the serious spectrum of *maanso-goleed* as well. Hence, if one can describe the past of the Somali poetry of colonial and pre-colonial times as 'the age of the *gabay*', the post-independence period can be called 'the era of the *jiifto*'. Here, a new phenomenon of unmistakable change is observed. As Guiseppe di Lampedusa once said, '*Se vogliamo che tutto rimanga come è, bisogna che tutto cambi* (if we want things to stay as they are, everything will have to change.)'[60]

3.3 Disappearance of melodic chant (*luuq*)

Having discussed the first salient feature of Somali traditional poetry which is going out of fashion in the post-independence period, namely the dominance of the *gabay*, we now turn to the second disappearing feature, melodic chant, known in Somali as *luuq*. The common meaning of the word in the Somali language is best defined in Yaasiin's *Qaamuuska Af-Soomaaliga* (Somali Dictionary) where the entry is given the following definition:

60 Il Gattopardo (The Leopard, 1957: 33).

> *Cod gaar ah oo gabayada iyo heesaha lagu qaado; cod lagu dheeraysto oo laga xareediyo*. (Yaasiin, 1976:284)
>
> A special tune to which poems and songs are chanted; a tune [chanted] loudly and pleasantly.

Traditionally, every single genre of Somali poetry, whether serious (*maanso-goleed*) or light (*hees*), had its own distinct *luuq* or *luuq*s by which it was unmistakably distinguished from others. Some important genres such as the *gabay* had numerous different *luuq*s to the extent that most great poets, such as Sayid Maxamed Cabdulle Xasan, had each their own favourite melodic tunes with which their poems were immediately identified. In their description of the *gabay luuq*, Professors Andrzejewski and Lewis write:

> The chant of the *gabay* usually has a simple melody with great variations in the length of the note. Some are held for a considerable time, and this applies particularly to those which correspond to the end of a line in the poem: in this position they fade gradually into silence. The tempo of the chant is slow and majestic, seldom changing throughout the poem. All emotional appeal depends on the expressive power of the words (Andrzejewski and Lewis, 1964: 47-8).

By custom, classical poetry was recited solo with a minimal participation from others and with no choral or instrumental accompaniment (Andrzejewski, 1967). A traditional poet or reciter would chant a piece of *gabay* slowly and majestically with a strong sense of self assurance; he chanted in such a way that gave an impression of superb restraint and stylisation. The only participation on the part of the audience was an occasional sporadic repetition of hemstitch, phrase or a word at the end of a particularly impressive line as an encouraging sign of appreciation and delighted reception.

Classical poets themselves frequently refer in their poems to their use of *luuq*, indicating its importance, in their view. In this connection, an early 20th century acclaimed poet, Salaan Carrabey boasts:

> *Lagjar faranji niman baa aqriya, laawis iyo beene*
> *Oo waliba laasima intay, lib isku moodaane*

Anse waxan u laaqimahayaa, tix ay ku ***luuq****shaane.*

Some men present white man's lectures and nonsensical lies
And keep at it considering this as an achievement,
But I teach them a verse which makes them chant [after me]. (cf. Andrzejewski and Lewis, 1964: 116; Said, 1982: 61)

In former times, no Somali poem was presented without *luuq*, to my knowledge. In recent decades however many poets, most notably those with formal education, have turned their back to the use of *luuq.* One may venture to say that the final curtain has fallen on the golden age of *luuq* with the death of the three great poets, Cabdullaahi Suldaan Tima-cadde (1920-1973), Cali Xuseen Xirsi (1913-1976) and Cali Cilmi Af-yare (c. 1929-1986) each of whom had his renowned distinct *luuq*. Close observation of the contemporary Somali poetic scene leads me to believe that these three were the last Somali poets of national stature who fully represented the familiar form (not content) of the classical poem in terms of *luuq*, preference of the *gabay* genre and the use of a stylised extensive introduction, the three traditional features discussed in this chapter.

Cabdullaahi Macallin "Dhoodaan" may be considered as one of the very few living poets from the older generation who stick to the use of their own distinct melodic chants. Poets such as Abshir Nuur Faarax "Bacadle" and Cabdulqaadir Cabdi Yuusuf "Shube" also occasionally recite their poetry in the traditional style of chanting into a variety of *luuqs*. However, unlike traditional poets, they just borrow melodic tunes of previous poets, rather than establishing their own *luuq*; and in many occasions they would part with the use of the technique altogether.

Among members of this generation of post-classical poets, Khaliif Shiikh Maxamuud (c. 1944-1982), was the only one remembered who was renowned for having a highly impressive *luuq* of his own. Khaliif was the initiator of a famous poetic series of political dissent called *Hurgumo,* (Festering wound). '*Hurgumo*' was originally the title of a polemical poem with which Khaliif launched the poetic combat in 1978 when

a group of Somali oral poets, sensing their country's lurch towards

> economic and political disaster (stemming from the related setbacks of the Ogaden War, the ensuing abortive coup and attendant drought and famine), took it upon themselves to articulate the "nation's ills" through the medium of oral poetry. The result was the birth of what came to be known as "the Hurgumo Chain", a series of polemical exchanges by pro- and anti-government poets in the old tradition of Somali pastoral bards. (Said, 1989: 31)

It can be argued that the magnetic charm of Khaliif's *luuq* could be one of the factors behind the powerful impact of his first poem which stirred a nation-wide response expressed in different ways, from poetic contests to anti-government armed rebellions which the poet himself eventually joined only to be killed in a civil war battle field in 1982. A detailed account of both the *Hurgumo* series and the work of Khaliif Shiikh Maxamuud is found in Said, 1989.

Since the early 1970s most poets seem to have been influenced by the new trend of *luuq-diid* (anti-*luuq*) versification in compliance with what the late poet Cabdi Muxumud Amiin calls '*isbeddelka dookha dadka*' (people's changing aesthetic tastes). Answering one of the questions I put to him, Cabdi explains the new shift: 'present-day recipients are not patient enough to keep listening till the end of the poem unless you compromise such time-demanding features as *luuq* which many see as an unnecessary remnant from the remote past'.[61]

Cabdi Muxumud's comment was reminiscent of what I witnessed in a literary event I attended in London. It was held on 21 February 1995 at Spitalfield Theatre in East London to launch a new poem by Maxamed Hadraawi called *Dabahuwan*. Hadraawi never uses *luuq* but one of the younger poets, Ismaaciil Aw Aadan, who presented supplementary pieces, attempted to recite his poetic contribution in the traditional way, i.e. he began chanting his *gabay* to one of the conventional *luuqs* of the genre.However, after reciting a few lines he was interrupted by the protesting shouts of the audience from every corner of the hall, asking the young poet to stop chanting and just read the piece "*caadi*"(normally). The poet had no choice, he had to comply with the audience's demand and abandon his favourite *luuq*, maybe forever.

61 Field notes, Djibouti, 4 August 2006.

Being one of the audience myself, I overheard two young Somalis, who sat next to me, exchanging the following comments: 'why is he wasting our time' said the first. 'He is from ancient times' replied the other scornfully, 'from the days of Raage Ugaas'[62]

The reaction expressed by the audience of that poetic event, most of whom were recent immigrants from Somalia, is typical of the current attitude towards the use of *luuq* among younger generations of town-dwelling Somalis. This however is not to suggest that there is no one left to enjoy *luuq*; in fact many people (myself included) continue to enjoy listening to a piece of nice poetry beautifully chanted, with a nice voice, to a melodic tune with magnetic charm.

In a nutshell, one can say that although many still enjoy the relaxed music and the majestic stylisation of the *gabay luuq*, the traditional device seems unable to stand up to the challenges of modern times. As Professor Andrzejewski (1967) points out, 'in spite of a certain hypnotic charm, [*gabay luuq*] may seem monotonous to anyone brought up on European music' (p. 6). To this one can add: not only to Europeans but to many town-dweller Somalis of the younger generations too, *luuq* seems monotonous and old fashioned and as a result, a fast increasing number of poets have gracefully abandoned it. For right or for wrong, *luuq* is certain to be going out of fashion.

One important aspect of Somali poetry which will be affected by the disappearance of this poetic device is genre differentiation. More so with the increase of the use of writing. As already discussed in chapter 2, there are genres which cannot be identified on paper; they can only be recognised when presented verbally and chanted to their familiar *luuq*. This is especially the case with the genres that share their metrical structures. Examples are members of the *gabay* family, namely the g*abay* and the *guurow*, together with some less known genres mostly used as dance

62 Raage Ugaas is a famous 19th century Somali poet. For the contents of the evening see Hadraawi, *Dabahuwan* (video recording), 21 February 1995.

songs.[63] A second example is the case of the *wiglo* family which comprises the *wiglo,*the *hirwo,* the *dhaanto,* the *belwo* and the *heello* (q.v.). For instance, consider the following couplet, one of many such couplets cited in Johnson's *Heelloy:*

> *Cishqigu waa toddoba haddii la tirshoo,*
> *Mid aan tegin taabka lay saar.*
>
> If counted, there are seven kinds of love,
> And one which will not go away was cast into my hands.
> (Johnson, 1996: 65).

On paper, one can only identify this couplet as belonging to the broad grouping of the *wiglo* family, but it is not possible, even for the expert, to tell which of the above genres the couplet comes from until it is performed verbally and sung to a certain *luuq*, which would inevitably be associated with one particular genre in the family. It is therefore the melodic tune alone that distinguishes these genres.

Herein lies the importance of both orality and the use of *luuq* in Somali prosody. The *luuq* component does not only add to the lyrical beauty of the art but substantially helps draw clear-cut boundaries between different poetic genres, a task otherwise far from easy to the non-specialist, and even to the specialist in certain cases like the example cited above. Hence, if the poets' turning away from the use of classical *luuq* continues, the possible implications of the development for the genre differentiation will be a matter for further research.

3.4 Poetic introduction fading away

The third stylistic feature of Somali classical poetry that is fading away is the leisurely-paced poetic introduction, once regarded as an essential part of any serious poem. Moreover, with the disappearance of the lengthy poetic introduction, two more elements closely associated with it have also been abandoned; these are the boasting of the poet (*faan*) and a fixed introductory formula which opens with the meaningless word *hooyaalayey* (see below).

63 One example of the latter is a dance song named after its refrain, *hoobaalayow heedhe*.

In structuring any serious *gabay*, the classical poet used to start with an elaborate introduction often divided into two sub-sections known as *arar* (roughly prelude) and *asoosan* (preface) before coming to the actual theme of the poem, the main body, known as *ujeeddo* (subject). As an indication of his competence, a skilled poet was expected to cover all these three parts in the said order.

While in the *asoosan* the poet often played what Said (1982: 148) calls 'cat-and-mouse' with certain ideas leading to the *ujeeddo* or closer to it, in the *arar* he would give free rein to his imagination allowing it to go far afield, probably as a kind of warm-up, or as a test to make sure that his listeners are all on board (Said, 1982: ibid). This initial part of the poem normally contained two familiar elements. The first was what Andrzejewski (1967: 6) terms 'prelude', a stanza (*tuduc*) made up of the repetition of a fixed series of meaningless rhythmic words which the poet chants to 'a tune appropriate to the genre he is going to use and from this prelude his audience knows what kind of poem to expect' (Ibid.) For example, when a reciter or singer begins to chant:

> *Heelloy, heellelloy,*
> *Heellelloy, heellelloy,*
> *Helleelli kalaynu leenahayeey*
>
> O heello, O heello,
> O heello, O heello,
> [And] we sing [yet] another heello. **(**Johnson, 1996: 33)

Everybody would know that what he is going to present is a *heello*; the specific melodic tune of the *heello* to follow and the length of its *tuduc*s (stanzas) becomes apparent. Among the serious or classical genres, the *gabay* had the best known 'prelude' called *hooyaale*. A typical traditional Somali poet would begin his *gabay* with chanting the following line:

> *Hoyaalayey hooyaalayey, hooyaalayey hooye*

repeated several times at different but complementary levels of melodic tune as an opening stanza setting out a specific pace for the metrical pattern, stanza format and

the melodic rhythm to which the poem is to be sung. As I said, the words themselves have no specific known meaning, but the feature as a whole primarily serves the functions stated above which are best articulated by an anonymous Somali poet in the following poetic lines:

> '*Hooyaalayey' gabayga waa ugu horraysaaye*
> *Halse kuma dartee waxay bishaa hooriskiyo jiibta.*
>
> [The word] '*hooyaalayeey*' comes first in the *gabay*,
> It adds no point, but sets out the rhythm and [supports] the chant.

The function described here by the Somali classical poet is very much in line with what Johnson (1996) refers to as 'the characteristic prosody of the genre' (p. 46n). Three more functions identified by Johnson, in the case of the *heello* 'introductory formula', are also applicable to other genres, including the *gabay*:

> First, it summons the attention of an audience to the poet, who then goes on to sing his poem. Second, it focuses the listener's attention on the poet's verse so that the first line of the poem itself is not missed. Otherwise, the point may be lost, for in some cases the first line represents fifty percent of the entire poem. The third purpose may be described as a sort of a signature tune (Ibid: 33).

Whatever purposes it served in the past, the technique has now been abandoned by most contemporary Somali poets who seem to consider it as an old fashion (Hadraawi, 1995). With a few exceptions, mainly in rural areas or in cases of traditionalist poets, the use of the traditional feature has substantially diminished.

The disappearance of the '*hooyaale*' may be related to the shrinking position of its sister feature, *luuq*, which has already been discussed. It looks like there is no more room for '*hooyaale*' in the absence of *luuq*, because the main function of the meaningless prelude (*hooyaale*) was to set the tune for the kind of *luuq* used in the genre at hand.

The second element commonly featured in the traditional *arar* but which has been

deserted in modern times was the poet's self-praise or boasting, in Somali *faan*. Like the Arab poets of the *al-'asr al-jāhiliyy*, or pre-Islamic times, the Somali traditional poet was in the habit of boasting about his poetic skills in the introductory part of the poem. In non-poetic situations, self-praise was not socially accepted in traditional Somali society, as instructed in the maxim below:

> *Nin is faanshey waa ri is-nuugtey.*
> A man who praised himself is like a goat that sucked its own milk.

However, poets were excepted from this code of ethics. The poet was not only allowed to show off his poetic skills and his ability to outdo other poets, but he was likely to be down-graded if he did not do so. The feature was so common to the extent that it served as the major theme of an entire poetic series exchanged in the 1940s by the leading poetic figures of the time.[64]

The name of this well known poetic contest was '*Nafti-hafar*', literally meaning self-delusion, or he who claims to possess something he doesn't; 'so named because boasting as a theme dominated the series' (Said, 1982: 72). Besides, the name of the *silsilad* alludes to a powerful phrase, itself boasting, which comes from Sayid Maxamed's famous rejoinder *gabay*, '*anfi* (discussed below) against Cali Jaamac Haabiil where he says: '*Nin kaleba naftiisa ha hafree...*' (. . . even though others delude themselves):

> *Harannimiyo hooyaale gabay, heello iyo maanso*
> *Nin kaleba naftiisa ha hafree, hoodo anigow leh.* (See Sh. Jaamac, 1974:319)
>
> The masterly composition of *gabay*, *heello* and *maanso*
> Is my own privilege, even though others may delude themselves.

One good example which demonstrates how the Somali classical poet manipulated the technique of elaborate introduction comprising *arar* and *asoosan* and how they boasted about their poetic skills is a poem called *Yarad Baaqday* (The Unpaid Bride-wealth) by the celebrated poet, Salaan Carrabey. In this well known *gabay*,

64 Among the celebrated poets who took part in the clan-based poetic duel where Qawdhan Ducaale, Cabdi Gahayr and Aadan Xayd Suldaan, (Said, 1982: 209n)

Salaan makes a poetic argument in which he aims to justify why he refuses to pay the amount of an additional bridewealth required by his in-laws. But before even saying a word indicating the actual subject (the *ujeeddo)* the poet soothes his listeners, impressing them or 'intoning' them with a sumptuous *arar* and *asoosan*.

He opens the poem with four lines stating that he had retired as a poet and 'had no desire to take up again the toils of poetry' but if he does he is certain to prove once again that he is the master of the art.

> *Lookaansi gabay Faaraxow, laaki ma lahayne*
> *Laflaf iyo lahwiga loo tirshiyo, jaray lurkiisiiye*
> *La'da xarafka laankiyo ba'daan, looyar ku ahaaye*
> *Nin awowgi loox ugu dhigoo, liil gashaan ahaye*
>
> Oh Faarax[65], I had no desire to take up again the toils of poetry;
> I had abandoned the travail of reciting importunate nonsense,
> Although I remain highly skilled in the art of alliteration, be it in the letter *l* or *b*,[66]
> Indeed I was taught on a wooden tablet by my grandfather who made me strong in the art (trans. In Andrzejewski and Lewis, 1964: 114-119).

After this boastful stanza, the poet proceeds to his *asoosan.* Here, the poet first describes what a good poem should or should not be; he then probes his audience with general observations of life interspersed with words of wisdom about old age in general and his own case in particular. He describes how he is now different from what he used to be as a young man:

> *Nin labaatan buuxsadey adduun, waa lagdamayaane*
> *Haddaan anigu lawfari iqiin, haatan lawlabaye*
> *Nin cirradu lammaanaha dhigtay, oo laylyan baan ahaye*
> *Lixdan labiyo toban baan kormaray, waana la hubaaye*
> *Lafta dhabar lixaadka i dabciyo, laafyihii gacanta .*
>
> When a man reaches the age of twenty he wrestles with the world.
> If I was once a 'loafer' now I am a decrepit old man.
> A man whose hair is streaked with grey like the strands of a robe and broken to burdens.

65 Faarax is the name of a man unknown to us addressed by the poet with the vocative *-ow*. See below for explanation of how Somali poets devise an addressee or confidante.

66 I have slightly amended the original translation of this line by Andrzjewski and Lewis.

> By twelve years I have exceeded sixty; and this is certain
> My backbone and my body have slackened and my arms have lost their swagger. (Andrzejewski and Lewis, 1964: 116-117).

It is after nearly half of the poem has gone to this introductory account that the poet turns to his intended subject, at the nineteenth line in a poem of forty-one lines. This is how he turns to the main subject:

> *Hadba waxaan lacaaf ridey rag baa, laystay yaradkiiye*
> *Labxan maayo caawana haddaad, lis is tiraahdeene . . .*
>
> Whenever I handed over a portion of my bridewealth it was consumed at once
> And if tonight you want to milk me [further] I will be dry (Ibid: 116).

Even after this, Salaan does not continue to just concentrate on his intended message or come directly to his main point; instead, he circles around it for a while and continues to be tempted to go afield every now and then, making some philosophical observations or generalised statements until the end of the poem approaches. It is only in the last four lines, and particularly in the very last line that the poet makes his point with the stunning poetic eloquence he was renowned for:

> *Seeddow ha igu soo lug go'in, lahasho waa caabe!*
>
> Oh brother-in-law! Do not tire your legs in vain [by coming to me]; it is shameful to hanker after gifts!

The poet tactfully employs the three lines before this concluding one to gradually neutralise his opponent, build up a suspense and develop a rising line of dramatic climax designed to explode in the last line where the whole message of the entire poem is delivered in a single, tremendous blast:

> *Laajeertidaan qabo barbaar, ladani waa mooge*
> *Adigoon lammaco awr leh wadin, ama liggood keenin*
> *Leegleegsadaa waa nebcahay, laanta dheer sida e*
>
> *Seeddow ha igu soo lug go'in, lahasho waa ceebe!*
>
> A healthy young man like you cannot know the sickness which I

endure;
It is you who should come with a burden camel laden with mats or bring its equivalent;
I hate those who come empty-handed, just carrying a long herding stick;

Oh brother-in-law! Do not tire your legs in vain; it is shameful to hanker after gifts! (Ibid: 118-9)

Another example of an even more ornate poetic introduction in Somali classical verse is found in Sayid Maxamed Cabdulle Xasan's famous diatribe' *Hanfi* (Parching Heat of the Wind), against Cali Jaamac Haabiil, another classical poet of singular stature who delighted in exchanging poetic duels with Sayid Maxamed. *Hanfi* (see Jaamac, 1974: 316ff for the full Somali text) is a striking example of the Sayid's skilful manipulation of the *arar* and *asoosan* technique, or what Said Samatar calls 'an argument by the back door or evasive communication' (Said, 1982: 148). This masterpiece is

> a poem of seventy-two lines, only one line - the last one - of which addresses the issue at hand. The rest is a jumble of philosophical observations on nature, culture, history and, of course, invective against enemy clans . . . holding the hearer in suspenseful anticipation while probing him for sympathy through the eloquence of language. Then he suddenly leaps to the attack: 'And the filth belongs to the donkey and to foul-mouthed Cali Jaamac!' (Ibid: 149)[67]

Thus, contrary to what a present-day reader might think, the time consumed by such a deliberately elaborate poetic introduction was not altogether time wasted. In fact, this was one of the techniques purposefully employed by traditional poets, especially in diatribes and poems of an argumentative nature. In the case of Sayid Maxamed Cabdulle Xasan, for instance, Professor Samatar approvingly describes how skillfully Sayid Maxamed made use of the technique to his advantage, how he tactfully

> withholds the point of his argument to build drama and suspense, circles around it, plays, as it were, cat-and-mouse with it and digresses into ostensibly irrelevant moralizing. The strategy is to

67 The original Somali version of the very famous line goes: *Huuraale Cali Jaamac iyo, huluq dameer baa leh*.

> disarm the opponent with a verbal barrage, to charm him with the range of his knowledge and the eloquence of his utterance. He then makes a precipitous descent from the lofty world of philosophizing into the practical one bickering, stating his case in a line, more often in an ironic twist of phrase that is usually difficult to refute (Said, 1982: 148).

Aside from instances like this, where argumentation or diatribe is involved, the technique of poetic introduction or *arar* and *asoosan* had performed more general functions. It is quite likely that, in the opinion of the poet, 'the audience needs some warming-up, some preparation, before it becomes attuned and receptive to the poet's message.' (Andrzejewski, 1967: 5).

Seen from this angle, the technique may be deemed useful, not to everyone though. A growing number of post-independence poets no more use poetic introduction, at least not in the same way as classical poets. A close observation of the body of Somali poetry produced in the post-independence era suggests a remarkable change. The use of *faan* (boasting) and of the formula of *hooyaale* has virtually disappeared from the hundreds of post-independence poems I have examined. A resemblance of other aspects of poetic introduction is still found in a number of the poems. Nevertheless, the way in which poets have used them is apparently different from the traditional way, in the sense that the current introduction is far less elaborate and much more relevant to the *ujeeddo* (theme).

Post-independence poets have tended to either leave out the introduction and go straight to the point or to use a shorter introduction closely relevant to the *ujeeddo*. An example of the first case is found in an interesting poem called *Macaan iyo Qadhaadh*, (Sweet and bitter) composed in the mid-1960s by the late well known poet, Axmed Ismaaciil Diiriye "Qaasim". The full text of this poem, along with English translation and extensive analysis, is found in Orwin, 2000.

The *ujeeddo* (theme) of the poem *Macaan iyo Qadhaadh* is the duality of good and bad in human nature which the poet skilfully depicts as being embodied in his own character. In a stark contrast with the familiar style of a traditional *gabay*, Qassim immediately spells out his *ujeeddo*, i.e., the central theme of the poem, right in the first two lines. In a style which looks parallel to that of a good essay writer, Qaasim

opens his *gabay* with a central poetic statement reminiscent of a topic sentence at the beginning of a well organised essay. Martin Orwin (2000) in his grouping of the lines of the poem rightly calls the first group of lines 'the theme section' (p. 200) where the poet comments on the good and bad characteristics in human nature; Orwin explains how

> line 1 achieves this succinctly through the metaphor of the *dacar* plant a species of aloe. This is described in the line as producing *malab* 'honey' (actually nectar secreted from the flower of the plant) whilst at the same time the listener is aware that the plant is bitter if eaten. The tenor of the metaphor is immediately clarified in line 2 in which the poet says explicitly of himself that he is both 'the sweet and the bitter in one place' (Ibid: 201).

Let us see how Qaasim immediately delivers his whole message in these exceptionally powerful first lines:

> *Dacartuba mar bay malab dhashaa, aad muudsataa dhabaqe*
> *Waxaan ahay macaan iyo qadhaadh, meel ku wada yaale*
>
> The aloe sometimes produces honey which you suck as sweet
> I am sweet and bitter together in one place (Ibid: 198).[68]

The rest of the poem evolves from this opening poetic statement, elaborating on the theme now established in such initial poetic 'topic lines', so to say. The poet gives us a whole range of pairs of contrasting traits which he attributes to himself in what Orwin terms 'syntactic parallelism', a sequence of descriptive couplets and a triplet which do not only evoke philosophical questions in our minds but irresistibly touch our sense of humour. Here are some more sample lines:

> *Nin majiiro keliyuun qabsaday, hay malaynina e*
>
> *Mar baan ahay mudeec camal san oon, maagista aqoone*
> *Marna macangag laayaan ahoo, miiggan baan ahaye*
>
> *Mar baan ahay muftiga saahidnimo, mawlaca u galaye*

68 The English translation of the excerpts from the poem presented in this discussion are from Orwin, 2000. The original Somali cited here too is the version used in the same source. For more information about the different Somali versions and the reason why this particular version has been chosen see Orwin (ibid: 197).

Marna makhaawi waashoo khamriga, miista baan ahaye.

. . . . . .
Mar baan ahay nin xaaraan maqdaca, marin jidiinkiiye
Marna tuug mu'diya baan ahoon, maal Rasuul bixine

Do not think of me as a man following one path only

Sometimes I am an even-tempered, obliging person, unprovocative
And sometimes I am an obstinate, dangerous, single-minded person

Sometimes I am a *mufti* who enters a sanctuary as an ascetic
And sometimes I am a mad, irresponsible person measuring out alcohol

. . . . . .
Sometimes I am a man who does not let prohibited things pass his throat
And sometimes I am a pernicious thief who would take even the possessions of the Prophet.

This style of spelling out the theme without long introduction is the one that characterises the main current of Somali transitional poetry. More particularly, this is what we find in most poetry by urban poets with formal education who therefore are more responsive to modern changes. This, however, is not to suggest that this is the case with every single poet or with every piece of contemporary poetry. Needless to say that in a period of transition, such as that of the post-independence Somali literature, conformity to a unified style of literary creation is not feasible. Naturally, different categories of poets prefer different forms of poetic composition; furthermore, many established poets tend to develop their own individual styles of versification. What is more, the same poet may employ varying styles in composing different poems on different occasions in different circumstances. Such a variation is usually influenced by factors such as the content, the context and the poet's mood at the time of creation. This will become obvious in the discussion that follows.

I stated earlier that post-independence poets tend to either go straight to the point or use a short introduction directly leading to the theme. I have illustrated the first instance by citing the example of Axmed Qaasim's poem. What follows is a good example of the second case. The passage presented below, which comes from a

moving poem composed by Abshir Nuur Faarax, nicknamed Bacadle (1992),[69] illustrates how the Somali transitional poet would open his verse with an introduction dissimilar to that customarily used by the classical poet: shorter, sharper, much more urgent (not 'leisurely-paced' anymore) and much closer to the *ujeeddo*, the theme.

Like almost all Somali poets of the transitional period, Bacadle relies on the audio cassette c*ajal* as his favourite medium of transmission. He himself expresses within the poem his close relationship with the magnetic tape, as we shall see shortly. He chooses to address the cassette skilfully personifying it as a devoted confidante to whom the poet turns at his hour of need.

The use of a confidante at the beginning of a poem is a common practice in Somali poetic tradition. The poet may address a confidante or a vocative, whether a memoriser, an animal, a bird, the breeze etc. (see Orwin, 2000:201n for more details) asking them to carry and disseminate his poem. In some cases the poet may address his poem to a person known or unknown to the recipients just as a linguistic aide in the structuring of his verse (*ku halqabsaday*). The best known confidante in the history of Somali versification is Xuseen Dhiqle, himself a poet, to whom the acclaimed poet, Sayid Maxamed Cabdulle Xasan, addressed many of his poems. Xuseen Dhiqle's chief duty within the Dervish movement led by Sayid Maxamed was to memorise the Sayid's poetry and pass it on orally to others.

It is thus an established technique to make the poem evolve from an opening in which the poet addresses his chosen memoriser or disseminator/reciter. What is new however is the type of such a memoriser or bearer of the poem, i.e., the personification of an *object* with which the poet converses in place of the *person* whose task it has taken over. In the olden days it was always the oral reciter or

69 Unlike poets such as Shube (see below) who shows a strong sense of documentation in his recording of the exact dates of both the composition of each poem and the recording of the cassettes, Bacadle does not provide information about dates in his recording. Therefore, I was only able to identify 1992 as the year in which the poem was composed and recorded; this is understood from references which the poet makes to some of the known events of the year, such as the destruction and looting of the oil tanks in Mogadishu. Another clue is given by the fact that the tape recording began to circulate widely as from mid-1992.

another person relevant to the poem at hand that the poet addressed (*ku halqabsaday*) as a vocative, as mentioned. Sayid Maxamed was particularly renowned for the use of such technique. We have seen already how in the opening of his famous *masafo* 'Make it Known to the World' Sayid Maxamed devised 'Cabdalla-maan-qaboobe' and 'Xirsi-maakiblaawe', the two disciples of his whom he assigned to carry and disseminate his important poetic epistle. In most cases however it was his lieutenant and chief poem-memoriser, Xuseen Dhiqle, whom the Sayid addressed for this particular purpose. On many occasions the poet expressed, through addressing his confidante, how deeply concerned he was about the fate of his poems being left under the charge of the oral memory of someone else. Expressing such a concern Sayid Maxamed pleads to Xuseen Dhiqle in the opening of the famous *gabay, Af-Bakayle*:[70]

> O Xuseen, by the will of the Lord, let not your mind vanish,
> . . . . . .
> Beloved, you'll not forget my words,
> Listen, then, to the chant of my poetic supplications.
> (Said, 1982: 70).

Shortly, we shall see how, in a similar plea, Bacadle opens his poem addressing the cassette in place of the human confidante.

Abshir Bacadle achieved his nation-wide fame in the early 1990s when he released a number of angry poems revolving around the political theme of '*dibuheshiisiin*' to use his words, meaning 'reconciliation'. He furiously condemns the crimes committed by what he refers to as '*dabley dirirsan*' (war-mongering gunmen), the front-line actors in the civil war that wrecked Somalia in the 1990s.

He recorded and distributed his first collection of peace-promoting poems in Mogadishu in an outraged response to the then raging distraction by rival clan-based militias of the country's economic infrastructure and all national assets onerously acquired over the centuries. As he states in his few words of introduction to the recording, the immediate incident which prompted Abshir to compose his first

70 For the full text of the original Somali version, see Jaamac, 1974: 1-3.

furious poem below on that particular day was the news that the *mooryaan hubaysan* (armed thugs) destroyed and looted the contents of the giant state-owned oil tanks on which the country relied for its fuel supplies.

Alarmed by such an irresponsible act of destruction, Bacadle unleashes this particular poem, which opens the whole collection in the tape recording I have chosen to use. Following is the opening stanza in which the poet addresses the cassette (*cajal*) itself, pleading for its co-operation in this utterly serious task:

> *Cajalyohow diyaarsani markaan, gabayga soo daayo*
> *Degdeg iiga qabo waxan ku faro, hayga daayicine*
> *Duruufaha na haystoo dhan baan, kuu dul marayaaye*
> *Nin damiir leh gaarsii mar qura, doqona ha u sheegin*
> *Bal inay u diiraan murtida, dibuheshiisiinta*
> *Oo ay u soo yare dabcaan, diinta nuxurkeeda.* (Bacadle, 1992).
>
> O alert cassette, when I let go my *gabay*
> Be quick in picking up my [urgent] message and lose it not.
> I give you a résumé of the hardships engulfing us.
> Take it to someone with conscience, never to a fool.
> So that people may reconsider the essence of reconciliation
> And restore some sense of religious spirit.

As we see, this is a different kind of *arar*, or rather *asoosan*, one in which the poet is too preoccupied with the surrounding pressure to contemplate any decorative introduction or any flowery roundabouts, as did the classical poet (see Salaan Carrabey or Sayid Maxamed above). Every word he utters is accounted for; every phrase is chosen to serve the purpose of alerting the listeners right from the outset. By line 2: 'Be quick in picking up my [urgent] message and lose it not' the poet has engaged our interest and made us fully aware of the urgent nature of the message being delivered. The third line: 'I give you a résumé of the hardships engulfing us' immediately declares the overall theme of the poem; at this stage, it was quite obvious to the Somali audience of the time that the theme of the poem was the raging civil war. In line 5 the poet further elucidates his message or the purpose of his poem as being that 'people may reconsider the essence of reconciliation'. In the second half of the powerful opening stanza, the poet challenges the 'conscience' of his audience. In this connection, the command 'Take it to someone with conscience'

sounds highly effective in challenging the receptiveness of the audience.

All in all, it is obvious from all the elements analysed above that, although this opening stanza appears as an introduction, it is organically related to the theme of the poem. Indeed, it serves a multitude of purposes, such as alerting the audience, introducing the subject, or setting out a framework for the poem and building up a suspense or creating an element of dramatic tension, all to reinforce the effect which the poet wishes to achieve.

Having secured the attention of his audience as well as their awareness of the subject, the poet immediately moves on to the main body of his verse launching a fierce attack against the armed militia or *mooryaan hubaysan* (armed thugs) led by ruthless warlords, who competed for looting, killing, destroying or, as Bacadle puts it: 'setting on fire every single site of value to the nation'[71] as though they had an obligation under the motto: 'fight and fight until you make sure all the people and all properties are exterminated'.[72] In the same sense, Bacadle laments in another poem on the same subject included in the same collection: *Qof inaanay naga reebin bay, qalin ku duugeene!* 'They have taken upon themselves not to leave on earth any of us alive!'

In response to this, the poet rushes to pronounce his statement of protest. The seriousness of the situation and its immense pressure is manifest in the mood of the poet as reflected in his choice of language, in the restless diction of the poem and in the anxious tone of the poet's fast-paced chant. All these present us with an overwhelming sense of urgency prompting us to denounce the ongoing fighting and destruction.

Note the big difference in mood between this verse and the other poem by the same poet, Bacadle, cited earlier in the chapter, the one composed upon the overthrow of the late dictator Siyaad Barre. Contrary to the poet's relaxed mood and hence his

71 This is the translation of Bacadle's line *Dab bay surahayaan meel kastoo, dahab ah sow maaha*. (Bacadle, 1992).

72 *Dad iyo duunyo dabar gooya oo, dirira sow maaha* (ibid.).

relatively lengthy *asoosan* or sub-theme in the previous poem, Bacadle in this poem does not seem to be in the mood for any rhetorical introduction or philosophical foregrounding. This time the man is in a battlefield, racing against bullets. His sole preoccupation is to mobilise all the potential of his talent in one single direction: stand up to the imminent death threat posed by the 'war-mongering gunmen' (*dableydirirsan)*, who seem to 'have taken upon themselves not to leave on earth any of us alive'. In his defiance against such a threat, the poet speaks 'not for himself only but for his fellow men. His cry is their cry which only he [as a poet] can utter' as Thomson puts it in his comment on the African poet's commitment to the common concerns of his people (in Amuta 1989: 176).

Thus, Bacadle here, bestowed with the customary assertiveness of Somali poets, comes forward to voice the crucial common 'cry' and make it heard before it is too late. That is why he chose to cut out the pace-setting prelude (*hooyaale*), skip over oratorical introduction, and shy away from boasting. Whether Bacadle has done this consciously or unconsciously one can only speculate, but it is most likely that the poet has not planned to follow this style fully consciously; rather, he is likely to have been influenced by the intensity of the imminent pressure.

3.5 The poets' use of different techniques in different contexts

Somali poetic experience attests to the idea that every given content and context necessitates certain idioms of form appropriate to express it best. We have already seen the difference in style and techniques between the poetry of Salaan Carrabey and that of Abshir Bacadle presumably due to the difference in their respective contexts. Salaan represents Somali traditional poets in a pastoralist lifestyle characterised by slow pace and relative abundance of time and space. Bacadle on the other hand represents the transitional poets who take their inspiration from an urban environment with rapidly changing social conditions which seem to have necessitated equal changes in poetry techniques and style (see chapter 2). In this respect it is important to observe that this disparity is not limited to a difference between two eras. Works belonging to the same era, sometimes created by the same poet, may be different in their use of stylistic features. A close observation of Somali

post-independence versification leads us to realise the existence of obvious differences between different poems composed under different contextual conditions. That is to say, in situations where the poet is in a relatively stable atmosphere with less immediate political and social pressure, he tends to use more of the 'leisurely-paced' traditional features discussed in the preceding sections of this chapter, including an extensive introduction. On the other hand, when the same poet has to take upon himself to respond to compelling political and social events in an anxiety-triggering environment he tends not to concentrate on stylistic elements. In this kind of situation the poet most truthfully attests to Said Samatar's assertion that the Somali poet is 'issue-oriented' (Said, 1982: 70); here the poet concentrates on the content, trying to deliver his message as quickly and as precisely as possible. When released from the grips of such an immediate pressure, the poetic mood of the same poet may be more attuned to the use of traditional, stylistic devices. He would generally give more attention to the aesthetic aspects of his poetic composition, and, as a result, his verse becomes vested with far more lyrical and linguistic beauty than in the case of the verses composed under an urgent political or moral pressure. A comparison between the two poems by Abshir Bacadle cited above would confirm this observation. In the first poem, in which he celebrates his fresh victory over the dictatorial regime of General Siyaad Barre, the poet uses an extensive introduction describing the unique qualities of the *gabay* genre and, by implication, expressing how proud he feels to be *gabayaa* or *gabay* composer. Conversely, in the second piece, in which he protests against the violent destructions of the 'war-mongers' underway, he furiously spells out his pre-occupation with his 'urgent message' right from the outset.

I shall endeavour to further substantiate the above statements in the following discussion of samples from the work of another transitional poet, Cabdulqaadir Cabdi "Shube", whose case has both similarities and dissimilarities with that of Bacadle. Shube gained his fame as a poet in the early 1990s after his release of a whole body of political poetry critical of the prevailing situation in Somalia; he launches a fierce attack against warlords and self-styled politicians whom he held responsible for the clan-based conflict and the subsequent anarchy in the country, a theme emphasised not only by Shube and Bacadle but by most composers of the

abundance of Somali poetry in the civil war era.

The poems discussed here are found in the poet's first and most significant collection on the aforementioned theme recorded by the poet on an audio cassette in November 1994 in Boosaaso, the main city in the north-eastern part of Somalia currently known as Puntland. The title of the collection is *Tixihii Halganka* 'The Verses of the Struggle'; the poet is keen to clarify the kind of 'struggle' he means: 'it is the struggle against violent conflict' he explains in his introduction to the recording. Most of the poems were published later in 2007 in a book entitled *Durbaan Garasho* (see Shube, 2007).

In *Tixihii Halganka* Cabdulqaadir Shube differs from Abshir Bacadle in two contrasting, even contradicting aspects. In the first he is more 'conservative' or more traditional while in the second he is more radical or closer to the modern-oriented innovations. First, in some of his poems, such as *Xisaabtan* (Accountability), *Larka kacay* (the Wailing Storm) and *Lama Garan* (Not Understood), he resembles classical poets in his use of such stylised features as the opening prelude (*hooyaale*), a rather lengthy introduction (*arar*) and somewhat decorative melodic chant (*luuq*).

On the other count however Shube is more radical than Bacadle in other poems; for example, while Bacadle uses the *gabay* more than any other genre, Shube employs a wide variety of short-lined genres which he uses far more frequently than the *gabay*. At times he is way apart from the traditional mode of presentation, especially when using a *beyd-gaab* form, which he does more often. In such instances, he forgets about chanting in any *luuq*, instead he adopts an informal, conversational style uncharacteristic of the traditional way of Somali classical poetry. For instance, in the composition of his well known poem, *Giraan* (the Cycle), which is considered as Shube's masterpiece in this collection, the poet employs such a 'revolutionary' or radical style which may be a factor in the marked popularity of the piece. Another possible factor behind the popularity of *Giraan* could be its central theme in which the poet voices the general attitude of the Somali public of the time critical of what Shube refers to in the poem as '*Intii gar-maqaate iyo / garaad-xume na xukumeen*', (the rule of tyrants and ignorants).

It is paradoxical that the poet, in his structuring of *Giraan* and a legion of other poems tackling the most complex political and philosophical issues, uses the metre of one of the shortest and traditionally lightest genres, the *guux* or *durbaan*,[73] as the poet himself prefers to call it. *Durbaan* is, as Shube explains in the introduction of one of his *durbaans*, a traditional performance practiced in the central regions of Somalia by young, marriageable people of both sexes in a mixed setting. It is featured by the beats of the drum, known as *haan* and the singing of the participants in solo or duets while the rest join in the chorus. In the improvised sung verses, boys and girls would engage in contests or in an open courtship. And it is in the improvised composition of the lyrics of such singing that the *durbaan* metrical form is used.

The metrical structure of the *durbaan* (shared by the rest of the *saar* family) is manifest in the fixed prelude of the *durbaan* performance, which goes:

Helley hoobaalayey.[74]
1 2 2 2 1 2

Parallel to this is the opening prelude of the *saar,* which is again just one line saying:

Helley waa taan lahaa.
1 2 2 2 1 2

Note how identical are the metrical patterns of the two in terms of number of syllables (six), number of units of duration (ten) and the positioning of long and short vowels. Compare this with the following line which opens and sets the metric pattern for Shube's masterpiece, *Giraan*:

Adduunyadu waa giraan
1 2 1 1 2 1 2
Life is a cycle.

Again, the line contains ten vowel units making up six syllables.

73 As I mentioned in chapter 3, there is a group of *hees* genres that share the same metrical pattern, namely the *saar* metre which we, therefore, call the *saar* family; the identified members of this family are the *saar*, the *guux*, the *baarcadde* and the *durbaan*. The word *durbaan* also means drum, as I elucidate in my in-text explanation.

74 The words of this prelude have no known meaning, as is the case with that of the *gabay*'s *hooyaale* or the *heello*'s *heellooy heellelloy*.

It is one of the elements of innovation in Shube's poetry that he makes an extensive use of the *durbaan* metre in many of his most serious political poems including *Giraan*, *Been-ku-nool*, *Dhabey googaa*, *Masalo*, *Durbaan garasho*, all of which are highly popular because of their supreme quality and their capturing of the pulse of Somali social reality at the time.

To further consider how strictly Shube conforms to the *durbaan* metrical form, let us cite the opening stanza of one of the most important poems by Shube in which the name *durbaan* is featured in the title, namely, *Durbaan garasho,* (The Drum of Awareness), which also is the title he has chosen for his book of poetry. Indeed, Shube in this poem addresses the *durbaan* as his chosen vocative in the same way as did Bacadle with the cassette. Urging the *durbaan* to carry and disseminate his peace-promoting message everywhere, Shube says:

Durbaan garashow diyaan
1 2 1 1 2 1 2
Dul iyo dooxaba ka danan
1 1 1 2 1 1 1 1 1
. . . . . .
Ha daaline orod durduri
1 2 1 1 1 1 1 1 1
Anaa ku dirtaye dadaal
1 2 1 1 1 1 1 2
Dalkiyo dibaddaba dhammee
1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 2
Dabayl nabadeed ku baaq.
1 2 1 1 2 1 2

O drum of awareness, thunder!
Let your beats reverberate on the hills and across the valleys
. . . . . .
Be quick and tireless
Do your best as my messenger
Travel throughout the country and abroad
Call upon people to bring about peace.

In the past, it was unthinkable for a serious public forum poet to use this kind of genre which has long been associated exclusively with situations of play and courtship among youngsters. In a conversation I had with him in Boosaaso on 16 August 2009 Shube himself admitted that in the olden days the choice of the

durbaan in place of the *gabay* to treat issues of this degree of seriousness would be seen as absurd.

The remarkable differences in form between Shube's poems, such as *Giraan*, using the *durbaan* and similar short-lined genres, and those using the *gabay*, such as *Gudban*,
indicates again the contradicting nature of the practices of the transitional poet who seems to be hovering between the two equally powerful influences of tradition and innovation, between conforming to the established and coping with the fashionable.

On another count, it is relevant to note that the deference observed between the two poets, Shube and Bacadle in the degree of their conformity to tradition may be considered as situational rather than categorical. The distinction may be due to the difference in their respective momentary feeling influenced by the degree of urgency of the situation felt by each poet at the time of composition. While Bacadle in Mogadishu was 'racing against bullets', as we have seen, Shube in Boosaaso was relatively away from such an atmosphere of immediate killing and destruction.

It is true that Puntland, where Shube lived at the time, shared with the rest of Somalia the impact of the collapse of the central state and civic institutions and the resultant setback in all spheres of life. Nevertheless, Puntland escaped the destructions of the war; or in other words, the extremely violent conflict in the South had not extended to this part of the country. Such a relatively peaceful environment may have influenced the relaxed use of traditional features in several of the poems referred to above by Cabdulqaadir Shube, who shares with Bacadle almost everything else, including his rural background and hence closeness to tradition, as well as his fight for peace and reason in Somalia.

3.6 Transitional method of poetry transmission

The method of transmission of post-independence Somali poetry is another important area where the transitional state of this poetry can be discerned. Customarily, the Somali poet relied on word of mouth as a medium of transmission,

that is passing the poem directly from mouth to ear or 'from mouth to mouth' (Andrzejwski and Lewis, 1964: 45). In the case of the serious poetry (*maanso-goleed*) the poet had to memorise his poem and pass it to his admirers who would learn it by heart and recite it to others; or he recited the poem at a gathering of community members who were quick to learn it by heart and disseminate it further and further until it spread throughout the Somali-inhabited territories. Andrzejewski and Lewis scrupulously describe this traditional method of poetry transmission:

> A good poet usually has an entourage of admirers, some of whom learn by heart his poems and recite them wherever they go. It is from these admirers that other reciters learn the poems, if they consider them sufficiently beautiful and important to memorise. ... In the nomadic interior whole villages move from place to place and there is constant traffic between villages, grazing camps and towns. Poems spread quickly over wide areas and in recent times motor transport and the radio have further accelerated the speed in which they are disseminated (Andrzejewski and Lewis, 1964: 45).

Since the early 1960s, when Andrzejewski and Lewis undertook their research, substantial changes have taken place, away from scholarly notice. With the fast development of new technology, such as the radio and television, the tape recorder and more recent electronic devices, up to the internet, the 'mouth to mouth', (ibid.) or mouth-to-ear method of poetry transmission has become a thing of the past. The introduction in 1972 of an official writing system for the Somali language deepened the changes. The unusually powerful memorisation skills for which the traditional Somalis were renowned waned gradually. The skills of those Somalis whom Andrzejewski and Lewis described as being 'endowed with such powers of memory that they can learn a poem by heart after hearing it only once, which is quite astonishing' (ibid) gradually declined.

As the result of all the above, the dominant method of Somali poetry transmission in the post-independence era is something which may be described as a new orality aided by writing and new technology. This is a blend of traditional orality, techno-orality and writhing. By 'techno-orality' I mean the type of orality which depends on the new, audio-visual technology as well as on some degree of writing and print. This is what Ong calls 'secondary orality' as opposed to 'primary orality', that 'of a

culture totally untouched by any knowledge of writing or print' (Ong, 1982: 11). By contrast, Ong uses the term 'secondary orality' to describe

> the present-day high-technology culture, in which a new orality is sustained by telephone, radio, television and other electronic devices that depend for their existence and functioning on writing and print. Today primary oral culture in the strict sense hardly exists. Still, to varying degrees many cultures and subcultures, even in a high-technology ambience, preserve much of the mind-set of primary orality (ibid.).

The Somali poet of the post-independence period heavily relies on audio-visual technology for the production, transmission and preservation of his or her poetry. He or she also makes use of writing to a limited extent. After the introduction and development of the writing system most poets put a quick draft of their poetry on paper as they compose them, not for the purpose of transmitting them in written form but as an aid to their oral memory which they no longer rely on. They then tape record it as soon as possible, reading it from the written draft. It is on this tape recorded version that the poet relies for the dissemination and preservation of his poem. There are poets who are still able to learn their poems, or at least some of them, by heart, with the help of either the recording or the written draft, while others have lost such an ability (Cabdi Muxumed, 2002; Cali Sugulle, 2010). More so in the case of formally educated whose oral memories have been significantly weakened by their long reliance on reading and writing.[75]

During the second and third decades following independence, cassette tapes became the pre-dominant medium of Somali poetry transmission. The radio and the television have also played a major role, especially the radio. Commenting on 'the increasing importance of cassette types as transmitters of that poetic tradition' (Said, 1989: 2), Said S. Samatar writes,

> Because of their high degree of fidelity in transmitting a poetic message in a verbatim form (something which the Somalis attach premium importance to), cassette tapes have become the principal vehicle for the preservation, transmission and dissemination of

75 For instance, I attended several occasions where the leading poet, Maxamed Ibraahim "Hadraawi" was presenting some of his poems, reading them from written sources, and in the introduction he said he was not able at all to learn hiswork by heart.

> Somali oral poetry. Moreover, thanks to Japanese technical ingenuity, fist-sized, battery-operated tape recorders along with cassette tapes have made their way in large quantities to Somali bush country, giving Somali oral poets an unprecedented opportunity to have their texts communicated to their neighbors, to the cities and to fellow Somalis abroad in exact, faithful rendition of their composition. (Ibid.).

Later, however, with the fast development of new technology, cassette tapes have gradually been replaced by more advanced sound and visual recording devices, from CDs and DVDs to more and more recent tools, such MP3s, ipods and the internet.

The role of writing, which remains far less significant than that of the above mentioned technology, is twofold. On the one hand, it is the first tool to which the poet turns for help with the creation and momentary preservation of the poem; that is what happens when the poet is putting the draft of the new poem on paper, as described above. The second role increasingly played by writing is documentation. Over the last two or so decades a note-worthy development has emerged in this respect. Numerous collections of poetry have been published, thanks to initiatives taken by new 'admirers' of poets. Like the poets in former times, described by Andrzejewski and Lewis, the post-independence poet too has admirers who volunteer to disseminate his poetry, this time not by reciting it but by collecting and transcribing the poems from scattered audio-visual recordings and putting them together in the form of a book script, with a view to publish them in a book form. The process has also included the collection, transcription and publication of classical works by great poets of former times. The result has been the recent publication of many books carrying numerous poems originally produced and transmitted in the orally-based method described above. Once published however, the poems are offered the opportunity for further dissemination and documentation. Added to this is the more recent development of poetry transmission through the internet which is based on writing. Besides, poems available on previous audio-visual recordings have also started to be disseminated through the internet.

One may presume that these new developments have the potential to lead to more substantial use of writing whereby the mainstream Somali poets start writing their

poems and relying on writing as an important medium of poetry transmission. Indeed, younger poets in the diaspora, who use the internet have started to do so (see Abdisalam, 2008).

I hope that this discussion has provided enough evidence to show that the transmission method of post-independence Somali poetry, and by extension the poetry in question, is in a state of transition.

3.7 Conclusion

In the body of this chapter I have considered how some salient aspects of Somali traditional poetry have changed in the post-independence era. I have presented evidence of how the pre-dominance of the *gabay* genre is shrinking, the use of melodic chant dwindling and the presence of elaborate poetic introduction fading away. Gone with the latter are the pace-setting formula, *hooyaale*, and the poet's customary boasting (*faan*).

One important element which all these features have in common is their leisurely-paced diction and elaborate stylisation. This may be seen as an important factor behind their going out of fashion in modern Somalia where the poet is under constant social and political pressure in the way we have seen from the example of Abshir Bacadle in the Mogadishu of the 1990s. In situations like this the poet is relentlessly pressed to be as economical in form as possible to be able to concentrate on his 'issue-oriented' content. Due to the intensity of the social and political pressures, the Somali transitional poet has become less concerned with stylistic features meant to delight the recipient, as the late poet Cabdi Muxumud Amiin has indicated (q.v.). Another major factor may be that the poet has to adjust his techniques to the changing aesthetic tastes of his new audience who seemingly no more appreciate time-consuming stylisation. Contemporary poets have to 'adjust themselves to fit the measurements of the time' (Al-hakeemi, ibid.). They have to find new ways in which they respond to how they feel their audience perceive their poetry.

In relation to the social imperatives, Antony Graham-White was not way off the mark when he argued that the main concern of contemporary African writers is 'to comment upon the pressures and conflicts in their society' and that 'social comment is the particular obligation of a writer in a rapidly changing society' (Graham-White, 1974: 97). The urgency of the new social and political imperatives in Somalia is so overwhelming that it is certain to take precedence over elements of lyrical and lexical decoration that had characterised the traditional poetry. It is my contention that the two factors stated above are the main reasons why the post-independence Somali poet has favoured the *jiifto* and other short-lined genres over the *gabay*, parted with the *luuq* and either modified or cut out the traditional type of introduction.

The chapter has also examined the significant changes that have been taking place in the transmission of the Somali poetry of the post-independence period. Evidence has been presented demonstrating that the traditional oral transmission has been replaced by a transitional one characterised by an amalgam of traditional orality, techno-orality, and the beginnings of writing. In this process the balance seems to be shifting towards writing in the long term.

The results of the discussion of all the above aspects support my initial hypothesis in chapter 1 that the post-independence Somali poetry is in a state of transition.

CHAPTER 4

TRANSITIONAL NATURE OF POST-INDEPENDENCE SOMALI POETRY: CHANGE-DEFYING FEATURES

4.1. Introduction

In previous chapters I have discussed the transitional nature of Somali post-independence poetry and asserted that this is manifest in part in the changing techniques of this poetry; it is also manifest in the poets' use of a blend of traditional and modern elements. In chapter 3 I have discussed the changing aspects of this transitional poetry, namely its departure from the use of a number of traditional elements that had featured in Somali poetry over the years. Prominent among these are the pre-dominance of the *gabay* genre and the use of both *luuq* and poetic introduction. In this chapter I shall look at the other side of the transitional ladder: the continued presence of other set of traditional features. Specifically I shall discuss the two major structural devices of Somali poetry, namely metre, in Somali *miisaan*, and alliteration (*xarafraac*) both of which have resisted modern changes and continued to feature prominently in all forms of Somali poetry to date. I will start my discussion of each of these features with a brief description of its main rules followed by the presentation of data showing its continued presence in post-independence poetry. Later in the chapter I shall endeavour to shed light on a literary trend which Somali literary circles started to debate since 1970s. This was focused on the restrictive effects of the customary form, particularly of *xarafraac* and *miisaan* and the need to free modern poetry from these constraints. Here, I shall discuss that, in spite of modern-oriented changes in certain aspects of the old form, such as genre preference, the attempts to break with the established structural techniques are yet to succeed. In the end I shall underline how all the above lead to the conclusion that the Somali poetry of the post-colonial era is an art in transition.

4.2 Fundamentals of *miisaan* and the development of Somali metrical studies

As touched upon in earlier chapters, Somali poetry follows a complex system of

quantitative patterning known in Somali as *miisaan*, literally meaning 'balance'. Somalis consider a piece as poetry only when the lines making it up are not only alliterative with each other but also balance one another in such a way that fulfils the requirements of the specific metrical template of the poetic genre at hand. The prosodic units of *miisaan* are called morae which are time units measured by syllabic length; a short syllable is treated as having one morae and a long one as having two, and the length of the syllable is determined by the length of its vocalic components, that is its vowel or diphthong units. Each poetic genre has its specific measure, in which each line of the entire poem has to have the same number of units of duration and has to follow the same pattern of short and long vowel arrangements. For example, each line in a *gabay* verse normally has twenty morae, or twenty vowel units, with an optional possibility of an additional unit at the beginning of the first half-line. There are also various other sub-rules; for instance, there must be two long vowels in the second half of the line.[76] In addition, the patterning of vowels' syllable final, consonants also play a role, according to the conclusions of a recent research (Orwin, 2001).

It is important to note here that in Somali metrical studies it was assumed until recently that metre is based on the number and pattern of vowel units alone. However, the ideas presented in a relatively recent and interesting article by Martin Orwin (Orwin, 2001) provide us with new, illuminating insights into a significant role played by consonants as well in Somali metrics. Orwin reintroduces the initial ideas of Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac "Gaarriye" (1976) on the role of consonant clusters and geminate consonants in the *jiifto* metre. In a more recent collaborative work, Martin Orwin and Mohamed Hashi Dhama 'Gaarriye' further developed the ideas on the importance of consonants in Somali metrics and provide new insights into 'the way in which certain consonants are constrained with regard to where they may appear in a metrical *jiifto* line' (Orwin and Mohamed, 2010: 255).

These are considered as the basic fundamentals of Somali metrics, a subject which had long eluded students of Somali poetics and which, despite significant progress in recent decades, is still far from settled. In spite of their earnest efforts, Andrzejewski and

76 For further information on these rules see, among others, Banti and Giannattasio, 1996; Johnson, 1996a; Orwin, 2001; Andrzejewski, 1982a.

Lewis write:

> We have not been able to establish the nature of the units of which the rhythmic patterns [of Somali poetry] are composed, and we have not succeeded in arriving at any definite formulations in this sphere. Our study of the number and length of syllables in each line and the distribution of accentual patterns among them has so far yielded very limited and disappointing results (Andrzejewski and Lewis, 1964: 46-47).

Some 11 years later, significant progress was made by the publication in the then Somali national newspaper, *Xiddigta Oktoobar*, of a series of seminal articles by a Somali poet, Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac "Gaarriye" (1976). Entitled *Miisaanka maansada* (Poetry metre), the articles outlined the basic rules of Somali metrics that govern some leading poetic genres such as the *gabay* and the *jiifto* along with a number of less prestigious genres of *hees* (light) nature such as the *baar-cadde* (a dance song) and *heesta kabdaha* (a work song). For an extensive analysis of Gaarriye's ideas in these ground-breaking and repeatedly cited articles, reinforced by further investigation, see Orwin, 2001.

This initial discovery was followed by a similar study carried out by another Somali scholar, Cabdullaahi Diiriye Guuleed (1978) who, in the mid-1978 published, in the same newspaper, a new series of articles looking into the fundamentals of Somali metrics. Cadullaahi's approach is rather different from Gaarriye's. Gaarriye focuses on the total number and positions of vowels in a line with the short vowel being the basic unit, Cabdullaahi's concern, on the other hand, is with the number and patterning of the syllables and long vowels as the basis for the metricality of the line. He underlines the division of the *gabay* line into *hojis* (first half-line) and *hooris* (second half-line) and that '*mid waliba tiro alan "syllable" [sic – his quotation mark] iyo tu shaqal dheer oo si gooni ah u ratiban buu leeyahay*' (each contains a number of syllables and long vowels arranged in a specific way). (Cabdullaahi Diiriye, 1978:3). The other important thing that has been touched upon by Gaarriye but not commented on by Cabdullaahi is that not just the vowels but also consonants play a role in Somali metrics.[77] It is

77 For an extensive discussion of the role of consonants in Somali metrics and how Gaarriye has pointed it out in the case of the *jiifto*, see Orwin, 2001.

relevant to note that the point has been overlooked not just in the articles of Cabdullaahi Guuleed but virtually in the entire body of literature on Somali metrical studies until the publication of Orwin's article above Orwin, 2001). In this article Martin Orwin brings to our attention that although Gaarriye pointed out the role of consonants as early as 1976, the point 'has not been followed up in the subsequent literature' (Orwin, 2001: 103).

The pioneering observations made by the two Somali scholars mentioned above had an eye opening effect on the study of the subject, despite their understandable limitations, i.e., their lack of more detailed analyses and clearly defined conclusions, more so in the case of Cabdullaahi Guuleed who modestly describes his endeavour as just '*kor-ka-xaadin* (sketching)' (Cabdullaahi Diiriye, 1978: 3). The guidelines provided by Gaarriye and Cabdullaahi encouraged other scholars to look at and comment on the subject in subsequent work of scholarship curried out in the years that followed (Johnson, 1979; Andrzejewski, 1982; Said; 1982; Antinucci and Axmed, 1986; Mohamed, 1989). Despite the fact that metrics has not been focused on in these works as the main subject, but has been commented on in the context of broader discussions on Somali poetry, there is no doubt that these efforts have contributed to the widening of our knowledge of Somali metrics. However, what had been achieved by the mid-1980s was far from sufficient to provide a complete understanding of the dynamics of this new and complex field of study. Describing the complexity of Somali rhythmic patterns and the need for further work, Said S. Samatar writes:

> Although the syllables in a poetic line are so arranged as to produce similar rhythms, or in some cases an identical rhythm, to the preceding or succeeding line, it is by no means easy to identify what it is in syllabic arrangement that produces the rhythm. The significant difference of opinion among contemporary students of Somali poetic scansion rules as well as the modest progress made even after numerous years of earnest research, testify to the complexity of the subject. (Said, 1982: 62).

In more recent years, further progress has been made by the publication in Europe and America of a good number of more focused articles to which the interested reader is directed. John Johnson (1996) and Banti and Giannattasio (1996) have separately investigated the way in which metric patterns interact with traditional music rhythms, shedding more light on some important aspects of Somali metrics.

Martin Orwin and Maxamed Cabdillaahi Riiraash (1997) have developed new ideas on the interweaving nature of different types of Somali metre, a subject touched upon in Gaarriye's early articles cited above but which had not been thoroughly investigated in the way done in this article. Again, one of the most recent and most innovative works which provide us with fresh ideas on previously overlooked aspects of Somali metrics is Martin Orwin's 'On Consonants in Somali Metrics' (Orwin, 2001). In this article Orwin rigorously investigates Gaarriye's original ideas on the various metrical positions in the *jiifto.* This leads to new conclusions giving us a better understanding of the role played by syllable-fanal consonants in Somali metre.

In light of this body of work which has developed over the last couple of decades, there is general agreement on the fundamentals of Somali metrics outlined above, although it is generally recognised that more research is needed in aspects such as syllabic arrangements, rhythmic positions, the role of the consonants and other variations in individual metre types. Students of Somali metrics continue to discover new things as research progresses. For example, 'the details of individual metres are revised as scholars learn more, as is the relation of metrics with the traditional musical performance' (Orwin, 2001: 104).

Departure from the *miisaan* rules is known as *laaxin*, meaning 'perversion' or 'deformation'; or *jaban*, literally 'broken', which is disdainfully rejected by the Somali poetry recipients, especially those whom Cabdullaahi Diiriye Guuled (1978) calls '*gabay-ruug*', lit. 'poetry-chewers', meaning poetry-minded. Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac 'Gaarriye' too, in one of his poems, states that people intuitively recognise when a line is unmetrical: *Dhegtaa diidda meeshay xarfuhu dalab ku yeeshaane* (The ear rejects where letters twist). (Gaarriye, 2007:115). In his afore-cited article too he writes, '*Dhegtaada ayaa markiiba wixii qalad ah soo saari karta*' (your ear would immediately tell what has gone wrong) (Gaarriye, 1976:17/1:3). To this he adds that it is difficult, however, for people to explain why a line is '*jaban*' (unmetrical). This is partly because, as I mentioned earlier, it was only in 1970s that the rules of Somali metrics were first discovered; and even after that most people, including poets and their audience, continue to be guided just by their intuition rather than by any

conscious counting of metrical units.

Having provided this background information about the Somali *miisaan* (metre), I should like to turn to my main point in this section: the continued use of this established, structural device in the Somali poetry of post-colonial times. It is an indisputable fact that the traditional metric system described above has continued to keep a tight rein on Somali versification to date. The abundance of post-independence poems cited in the preceding chapters – from the most serious verses of *Deelley* and *Doodwanaag silsilads* to the pop-like recent songs by young artists in the diaspora (see Lafoole and Sahra Halgan) – all comply with the rules of the conventional *miisaan*, predominantly that of the *jiifto*, as illustrated already. So is the entire oeuvre of *maanso-goleed* poetry created in the said period. This aspect of Somali poetry, i.e., its compliance with the rules of *miisaan*, does not seem to have been influenced by the modern developments discussed in the preceding chapter, i.e., the developments that led to the observed changes in other aspects of poetic form, including the customary preference of the *gabay* form, which itself is a metre-related aspect. Here, it is interesting to observe that instead of departing from the use of metre altogether, as occurred in the history of other poetry traditions[78], Somali post-independence poets have only shifted their metre preference in favour of short-lined genres, in the manner discussed in chapter 3 – their modern innovation in this regard is only represented in their choice of short-lined metre types in preference to the long-lined such as the *gabay* and the *masafo*.

4.3 Alliteration and its unchanged use to date

The second established, structural feature which has resisted modern changes is alliteration, in Somali *xarafraac*,[79] lit. 'to follow a letter'. Although alliteration has generally received far less scholarly attention than metre, comments on it are found in a good number of works on Somali poetry; for instance, Kirk, 1905; Cerulli, 1964; and Andrzejewski and Lewis, 1964. In more recent years the feature has been discussed in a number of works mostly dealing with other aspects of Somali poetry as well

78 These include English, Arabic and Swahili poetic traditions, as we shall see below.

79 The term *higgaad* is also used sometimes, but *xarafraac* is more commonly used and it is more Somali. A loan word slightly distorted from the Arabic *hija'*, *higgaad* means spelling.

(Andrzejewski, 1982; Said, 1982; Andrzejewski with Andrzejewski, 1993; Banti, 1996; Orwin, 2000). As observed by Andrzejewski and Lewis (1964), alliteration is 'the most striking feature of Somali poetry which can be noticed even by a person who does not know the language' (p. 42).

What is particularly interesting in this traditional device is its paramount presence in virtually all forms of Somali verbal art of all times. Aside from poetry, alliteration is used in proverbs, oral narratives and words of wisdom, including those that seem to be of remarkable antiquity. Andrzejewski believes that

> Alliteration in Somali poetry is probably of great antiquity, since it is used in proverbs, including those which are archaic in their vocabulary and grammatical forms. Alliteration is also found in invocations and blessings some of which appear to be of a pre-Islamic character (Andrzejewski, 1982: 71).

In the next chapter on Somali drama we shall see how in contemporary theatre too alliteration is a salient feature; it is employed in transitional plays as one of the techniques carried over from Somali oral tradition.

The type of alliteration found in Somali poetry is that of initial sounds or the so-called head rhyme, with some variations[80] explained below. Consonants alliterate with identical consonants while all vowels alliterate with each other.

It is interesting that the use of alliteration makes Somali verse shares characteristic with old English poetry rather than with the poetry of the neighbouring cultures of Swahili, Arabic, Oromo, Amharic, Harari and Saho; while the lines (or half-lines) in verses composed in all these languages are linked by an end rhyme, in Somali poetry lines are alliterated with each other by an initial sound which must begin with at least one word in each line in a short-lined verse or each half-line in the case of a long-lined one, as

80 While head rhyme or initial rhyme in English tradition is the use of the same consonant at the beginning of stressed syllables in a line, in the case of the Somali *xarafraac* it is the beginning of the word that alliterates.

mentioned. However, unlike old English poetry, in Somali versification the same alliterative sound must be used throughout the whole poem, especially in the case of the public forum poetry and all other significant pieces.[81] Alliterative words must be lexically substantial, i.e. they must be verbs, nouns, adjectives or adverbs.

The following stanza from a *geeraar* by a nineteenth century great poet, Raage Ugaas, in praise of his beloved horse, by the name of Walhad, illustrates how these rules apply in the case of a short-lined (*beyd-gaab*) genre. The chosen alliterative sound in this poem is the consonant **w** marked by the use of bold at the beginning of the alliterative word in each line:

Geeraar waa nin ***w****anaajiyo*
Nin ***w****araar kaga oodmiyo*
Nin sidayda ***w****arkiisiyo*
W*acdigiisa yaqaane,*
W*alhadow faraskayga*
W*eedh yar oon ku ammaanay*
W*owga maan ka bilaabo.*

When there's a *geeraar* poem to be created
There are some men who are held back
As if confronted by a precipice
Others, like me, are skilled in its art,
And in the powers of good counsel it contains,
So, I shall compose some praises for my horse, Walhad
And start them with the sound of '*waw*'.[82]

Structured in the *miisaan* of *geeraar*, a short-lined genre which requires the minimum of one alliterative word in each line, the seven lines from this poem contain seven words (*wanaaja*, *waraa*r, *warkiisiyo*, *wacdigiisa*, *walhadow*, *weedh*, *wowga*) beginning with **w**, the alliterative sound chosen by the poet. The same applies in the rest of the *geeraar.* More examples illustrating how alliteration works in Somali verses have

81 For information about some minor exceptions, where alliterative sounds may change within a poem, see Orwin 2000: 196 and Banti, 1996: 186-7. Also see below for certain exceptions.

82 Translated in Andrzejewski with Andrzejewski, 1993: 9-10.

already been provided in the preceding chapter.

An exception to the rule that the same alliterative sound should be maintained throughout the whole poem is found in some chiefly religious old poems in which poets used certain alliteration arrangements called 'alif-kaa-ya'[83] (from-*a*-to-*y*), whereby lines in each stanza have their separate alliterative sounds, following the order of the Arabic alphabet.[84] The best known example of verses following 'alif-kaa-ya' alliteration style is the work of a 18th century poet, and *mufti* (religious sage), Shiikh Cali Cabdiraxmaan, nicknamed Xaaji Cali Majeerteen (q.v). According to the late Andrzejewski, Shiikh Cali's *masafos* are the oldest preserved Somali verse by a known author (Andrzejewski, Collection, B. 8). One of those *masafo*s, *Alif yeen*[85] ([the letter] Alif said), in which the author personifies the letters of the Arabic alphabet to expound to the listener the principal tenets of the Islamic faith, is found in Abdisalam Yassin's thesis, *Sufi Poetry*, (pp. 191-195).

Departure from the rules of alliteration is called *deelqaaf*, meaning stray or wandering, which is immediately disdained by the Somali listener. The literal meaning of the word *deelqaaf* is composing lines whose supposedly alliterative words begin with a mixture of *deel* (*d*) and *qaaf* (*q*), instead of keeping on one; which means failure to meet the requirements of alliteration. In an attempt to trace the origin of the term, Ibraahin Yuusuf Axmed assumes

> *waxaa laga yaabaa markii u horraysey ee uu ereyga deelqaaf baxay in ay ahayd mar uu qof soo bandhigay tix ku wada socota labada xaraf ee **d** iyo **q**, dabadeed lagu dhaliilay: tixdaadu waa **deel-qaaf**. Ka dibna ay sidaa ku hirgashay.*
>
> It is possible that the use of the word *deelqaaf* began when someone presented a poem alliterating in both *d* and *q* and was received with

83 '*Alif*' and '*ya*' are the first and last letters in the Arabic alphabets as are 'a' and 'z' in the English one.

84 For more information about 'alif-kaa-ya' see Yaasiin Keenadiid's *Ina Cabdille Xasan*, pp. 69-70.

85 The word '*yeen*' is the archaic version of the word '*yiri*' in modern Somali.

the disapproving comment: your verse is *deelqaaf* (Ibraahin, 2003: 2).

Apart from the above meaning (inconsistency in alliteration), the concept of *deelqaaf* also refers by extension to other aspects of poetic flaw (both in form and content) such as where a poem is unmetrical or at odds with the ethics of the practice.

It is interesting to note that Somali poets, past and present, tend to underscore their use of alliteration thus emphasising the importance of this poetic device in Somali versification. The nineteenth century poet, Raage Ugaas, in his equestrian poem above brings to our attention the fact that he alliterates in *wow (w)*: '*Wowga maan ka bilaabo,* (And I start them with [the sound of] *wow*)'.[86]

Unlike Raage, who sounds relatively modest in this poem, most classical poets often boasted their ability to master the art of alliteration which make them 'rise above the rabble of upstarts' (Said, 1982: 61) who are unable to survive the pitfalls of this tortuous technique. Even in current poetry the style of boasting has not totally disappeared as yet, although it has remarkably diminished, as discussed in chapter 3. A contemporary poet, Cabdulqaadir Cabdi Yuusuf "Shube" (q.v.), marks the end of each main point raised in one of his well received poems with the following refrain stanza (*dhextaal*):[87]

> *Afartaas intaan '**d**eel' ku dhigay, **d**aw ma qabadsiiyey*
> *Ma **d**aroorshey maansada rag baa, galiya **d**eelqaafe*
> ***D**annigii calooshayda jiray, **d**aacad ma u sheegay*
> ***D**acwed kalena iga hooya waan, idin **d**areensiine* (Shube, 2007:34).
>
> .
>
> Haven't I articulated this lot marking them with *deel* [***d*** sound]
> Haven't I been consistent unlike those whose poetry is dilapidated by *deelqaaf* (broken alliteration)
> Haven't I faithfully expressed my feelings
> Let me [then] deliver one more assertion

The citation of this example here is relevant as it serves one more purpose. Metrically

86 '*Wow*' is the name of the letter that represents the sound 'w' in Arabic.

87 This passage comes from a poem called *Xisaabtan*, 'Accountability', composed in December 1993.

structured in the *miisaan* of *gabay*, the stanza illustrates the occurrence of the alliterative sound in a long-lined (*beyd-dheer*) genre with two half-lines divided by a caesura (marked here by the comma). Here, unlike the short-lined poem cited in the preceding example, two alliterative words are found in each line, one in each half-line.

This reiterated and emphasised reference by poets to the use of alliteration is indicative of its importance in the eyes of both the poet and his or her audience. This presumably explains the unparalleled paramountcy of this feature in Somali literature past and present.

Of all the stylistic features examined in this study, *xarafraac* or alliteration seems to be the most resistant to modern influence. If *miisaan* (metre) has partially been shaken by modern developments (albeit insubstantially) in terms of metre preference and certain metre-free experimentation, especially in the field of the modern song, alliteration remains fully unchanged. My research leads me to believe that all forms of post-independence Somali poetry continue to comply with the rules of traditional *xarafraac* as strictly as ever. A look at the ample excerpts presented throughout this thesis would testify to this assertion. The hundreds of sample poems I have collected and examined within this study attest to Andrzejewski and Lewis's contention, over forty years ago, that 'the most striking feature of Somali poetry, which can be noticed even by a person who does not know the language, is its alliteration.' (Andrzejewski and Lewis, 1964: 42).

In addition to the use of Somali *xarafraac* in poetry where it features most prominently, it is curious to observe that its employment extends to other forms of Somali literature. For example, it is used in the drama as well as in the novel. It is also used in a wide variety of language use in day-to-day life, e.g. advertising, naming children, book titles, and so forth. I have already mentioned the utilisation of this technique in various forms of Somali oral tradition such as proverbs and oral narratives.

To illustrate this, I shall cite a few examples. Given below is a riddle, in Somali *googaale*, a popular form of verbal game played by children in most Somali regions as

a pastime activity and as an intelligence test among children. It is in question and answer format:

Q. *Wax **d**ooxan*
*Oo **d**abran*
*Oo **d**aaqa ?*

A. *Sikiinta.*

It freely translates:

Question: My stomach is taken out,
I am tied up,
Yet I can graze.
Who am I?

Answer: Razor

The combination of brevity and alliteration (in ***d***) gives this piece an aesthetic beauty and makes it pleasant to the ear. Alliteration is also considered as a useful aid to oral memory.

Among modern literary forms other than the poetry, it is in the drama that alliteration features most prominently. *Xarafraac* is used in aspects such as poetic dialogue, the naming of characters and the titling of plays. I will discuss all these in detail in the next chapter on Xasan Sheikh Muumin's play, *Shabbeelnaagood.* Here, suffice it to cite some examples of plays with alliterative titles. These include, ***M**iyi iyo **M**agaalo,* 'Country and town' (Cabdullaahi Yuusuf Farey, 1959); ***D**aadoy iyo **d**alnuurshe,* 'Daadoy and Dalnuurshe' (Aweys Geeddow, c.1967); ***S**ir Naageed lama **S**algaaro,* 'Tricks of women cannot be reached' (Shiikh Mayow Halaag, 1976); ***Q**aran iyo **Q**abiil,* 'State and clan' (Cabdi Miigane, 1985).

Xarafraac is also used in prose fiction writing, albeit at a lesser degree. As part of my data collection, I have investigated a variety of novels and short stories in most of which alliteration is used to varying extents. When I looked at some of my own prose fiction works, among others, I was surprised to find an unexpectedly frequent use of *xarafraac* in my own novels *Maanafaay* and *Galtimacruuf.* Here is a sample extract

from *Maana-faay*:

> ***M**uddo la sii **m**ushaax. **M**ugdi la sii jibaax. **M**aana laga yaabi. **M**aaweelo lagu dey. **M**iro looga dhalin waa. **M**ar dambay bidhaani **m**uuqatay (*Maxamed, 1997: 45).
>
> They cruise a bit further. They indulge driving through the dark forest. Maana-faay gets more scared. They try to entertain her. It doesn't work. At last, a glimpse of light twinkles in the distance.

The six short sentences in the passage are held together by a pattern of alliteration; they all begin with **m** sound and this gives the ear a pleasant sense of patterning. As far as I can recall, I did not make any conscious effort to use alliteration in my fiction writing. Yet there is it; it may be the product of the inner workings of the sub-conscious mind which tends to take over in moments of emotional and dramatic intensity in the literary creation process.

In this passage we are in a moment of dramatic build-up in the development of the plot where Maanafaay, the female chief protagonist, undergoes a new, exciting but frightening experience. She is a totally inexperienced school girl from very traditional family. She is in an evening ride to the unknown with two stranger playboys and a female friend of hers whom the boys used to trap Maanafaay by deceitful tactics; they needed a second girl to have a group of two couples to indulge in a night of pleasure-seeking extravaganza in a romantic suburban compound outside the city of Mogadishu. Maanafaay's fears accelerate when she realises that the car is getting out of town into a suburban forest, through increasingly scaring landscapes, a world she had never imagined to venture getting into. This is the moment of intensified excitement being captured in the passage. The fast pace of the writing style and its alliterative patterning may be seen as corresponding to the increasing tension and the imagined fast heartbeat of the innocent school girl suddenly caught in this kind of situation.

It is curious to note that the use of alliteration in Somali literature extends to the modern novel, not only in Somali but also (more surprisingly) in foreign languages as well. The work of the world-famous Somali novelist, Nuruddin Farah, is a case in point. Nuruddin's frequent use of alliteration, is one of the elements in his English

language novels commented on by several critics (see, for example, Wright, 1994: 16) as an indication of the influence of Somali oral tradition in Nuruddin's writing in English, especially in his early work. In *A Naked Needle,* for instance, we come across frequent alliterative couplings such as 'They quite quietly consume their consomme' (Nuruddin, 1976: 77); 'we tire our human tyres' (Ibid: 92).

4.4 On the border between tradition and modernity

One of the positive impacts of the introduction in 1972 of an official writing system for the Somali language (at a time of national awakening and new vitality that accompanied the euphoria of the first years of the military-led 'revolution' of 1969) was a general renaissance in Somalia's literary life.[88] As one aspect of such a resurgence of literary energy, a new debate raged among poets and literary commentators on the need to modernise Somali versification, which meant, in most part, to introduce poetry free from the constraints of alliteration and metre, which young poets and literary scholars considered as *dhaabad* (stumbling block). See below. The national media, most notably the national daily *Xiddigta Oktoobar*, was used as a forum for such a heated debate. Radio Mogadishu was also used frequently.

One of the most prominent voices in this heated debate was the poet and literary commentator, Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac "Gaarriye" who, in his weekly literary column, *Toddobaadkan iyo Suugaanta* (Literature this Week) in *Xiddigta Oktoobar*, (Gaarriye, 1976) stressed the need to free the Somali verse from the constraints of '*higgaad*' (alliteration) in a move reminiscent of Milton's rejection of rhyme in English poetry over three centuries earlier.[89] In response, a number of poets and literary scholars disagreed with Gaarriye's call to break with the use of alliteration. Cawad "Khooli", a poet and literary scholar, was one of the first to take issue with Gaarriye, rejecting his argument that

In higgaaddu [tahay] shardi adag oo loo baahan yahay in gabyaaga

88 See Andrzejewski, 1975; 1977 for more information about this literary flourishing.

89 The difference is that Gaarriye did not practise his proposed, non-alliterative form in his own poetry.

> *Soomaaliyeed laga xoreeyo. . . . Waxaana dhacda in higgaaddu ku jirrabto gabyaaga inuu isticmaalo erey ka leexsan ujeeddadiisii oo aan si dhab ah u cabbirayn dareenka (*feeling*) naftiisa. Haddaba haddii uu yahay dhaabad waa in aynu dhaqso uga xorownaa shardigaan.*
>
> Alliteration is a rigid condition from which the Somali poet needs to be freed. … What happens is that alliteration requirements compel the poet to use a word which is not appropriate to express his ideas or feelings. So, if this condition is an obstacle we have to free ourselves from its constraints soon (Quoted in Khooli, 1976: 3).

Commenting on Gaarriye's position above, Khooli questions why he only rejects the use of alliteration while recognising the rules of *miisaan* (metre)[90] which itself imposes obstructing conditions, '*miisaanka maansada oo laftiisu shardiyo ku dabraya leh*' (Khooli, 1976:3). Khooli further explains the position of those whom he sarcastically refers to as '*xerta fallaagowdey*' [the rebellious students], meaning those critical of the views presented by Gaarriye; he explains,

> *Dadka diiddan in higgaadda gabayga laga tago, ma dafirsana inay higgaaddu dhaabad adag tahay, waxayse ku doodayaan in gabyaanimaduba tahay awoodda qofku kaga gudbayo dhaabadaha iyo shardiyada ad-adag ee maansada (xag higgaadeed iyo xag miisaan mid kastaba ha ka yimaadeene). Awoodda[a] yaabka leh ayaana ugu wacan inaynu ku tilmaanno gabyaaga "hibo"* (Ibid*).*
>
> Those against departure from poetic alliteration do not deny that alliteration is a hurdle, but they argue that the very essence of being a poet is the ability to meet the challenge of overcoming the difficult conditions of [traditional] versification (whether imposed by alliteration or metre). And it is because of this unusual ability that we describe someone as a gifted poet.

As the debate carried on in *Xiddigta Oktoobar*, Gaarriye (1976) responded back to Khooli making it clear that when he highlighted the need for a new verse free from alliteration he never defended the continued use of metre either. He clarifies the emerging misunderstanding saying,

> *Way jirtaa inaan soo bandhigo habka ay u dhacaan maansooyinkeennu. Hayeeshee taa micneheedu ma aha inaan*

90 Gaarriye had expressed his new ideas advocating an alliteration-free verse within the series of articles in which he explored the fundamentals of Somali metre.

> *rumaysnahay inaynu iyaga uun ku dhaqanno. Wuu jiri karaa waana loo baahan yahay qof keena si ka fudud oo ka shardiyo yar sida aynu hadda u maansoonno.* (Gaarriye, 1976:3). .
>
> It is true that I present the different rhythmic patterns of our poetry; however, this does not mean that I believe that we have to continue sticking to them. There is the possibility and indeed the need to come up with less complicated, less restrictive [metrical] system for our current versification.

Thus, the main trend in this heated debate was a call for a change, i.e., the need to modernise the contemporary poetry by 'freeing' it – to use Gaarriye's words – from the structural rules inherited from the traditional poetic form which the young generation describes as *dhaabad* (stumbling block). This development was of historical significance in the sense that it was the first time in the known history of Somali versification that the use of metre and alliteration was questioned, even challenged. The drive was presumably stimulated by a number of factors that prevailed at the time. One of them was the changing content and context of post-independence poetry as discussed earlier on in chapter 2. In addition, a vibrant literary movement pregnant with new ideas was set in motion, as stated, not only in the poetic arena but in all aspects of Somali literature including the drama (see Andrzejewski, 1977). This new literary drive, including the debate on the need for a poetic reform, was led by a group of newly emerged literary commentators and educated poets inspired by the impetus generated by introduction of an official Somali orthography and the rise of a new wave of written literature[91] as mentioned above. Most members were young poets and literary scholars affiliated to educational institutions such as Lafoole Institute of Education the outskirts of the capital, Mogadishu. The leading figures included Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac "Gaarriye", Ibraahim Cawad "Khooli", Cabdullaahi Diiriye Guuleed, Siciid Saalax Axmed and others.

Here, it is worth noting that, unlike traditional poets whose exposure to outside influence was limited, members of this new, formally educated group were remarkably influenced by foreign experiences.

91 For detailed information about the rise of this new literature see Andrzejewski, 1975.

The new media arguments critical of the continued use of the old structural techniques in contemporary poetry were echoed in a number of scholarly works on Somali versification. In his important article, 'Alliteration and scansion in Somali oral poetry' Andrzejewski remarks that

> The rules of Somali versification were very demanding and imposed severe constraints on the phonological characteristics of the words used by the poet. His lexical repertoire had to be augmented by sources which lay beyond the limits of the language of practical communication. (Andrzejewski, 1982: 77).

Underlining the hindering impact of such 'demanding' rules on areas such as improvisation and the length of poems, Andrzejewski contends,

> Clearly, under the constraints of the system of versification long poems would be extremely difficult to compose. An epic poem alliterating in the same sound would hardly be feasible. It was also very difficult to improvise under those constraints. (Ibid: 78).

In a similar view, Said S. Samatar highlights

> the restricting, and hence, debilitating effects which devotion to alliteration imposes on Somali verse. Something of the difficulty faced by the Somali poet, unaided by written tools, can be appreciated when it is realised that a poem of a hundred lines, a length by no means uncommon, demands two hundred words of similar sounds to begin its two hundred hemstiche. (Said, 1982: 60).

At the height of the debate on the need for a change some enthusiastic modernists had scornfully described the untalented poet who confuses his audience in his arduous search for alliterative words; he is carried away into distant worlds which have nothing to do with what he was trying to express in his poem. One of the authors who made such comments was a poet and literary commentator, Maxamed K. Salad, who humorously depicts what he considers as the tortuous journey of an unskilled poet

> who, trying to alliterate in '**t**', took off at *T*aleex [the Dervish capital in northern Somalia] and then went soaring towards *T*anzania and from *T*anzania to the *T*hames via *T*anarive. Then sensing the wrath his outraged audience catching up with him, he took a mighty desperate leap to *T*oronto, but unable to find a respite from his angry pursuers, he soared again, this time in the direction of Far East where he kept

> hopping about between *T*hailand, *T*aiwan and *T*okyo. His hapless audience eventually traced him to *T*okyo only to find that he had taken precipitous flight to *T*impuktu via *T*angier! (Cited in Said, 1982: 61).

While on the one hand such a dissatisfaction with the continued use of the old form was expressed in Somali literary circles, appreciation of its advantages was not absent either. Some commentators contended that alliteration restrictions, for example, give the competent poet 'an opportunity to rise above the rabble of upstarts' (Said, 1982: 61). It was argued that challenging requirements make 'men with real talent dazzle their audiences with their powers of expression, undiminished by the rigidity of the form' (Andrzejewski and Lewis, 1964: 43).

As we have seen above, Cawad Khooli goes so far as saying that it is the ability to meet the challenges of the binding requirements of alliteration and metre that make us tell whether someone is a gifted poet (Khooli, 1976:3). This might be a valid argument under the assumption that a poem free from alliteration and metre constraints is one which does not comply with any binding requirements of form; this however is not the case. Any good poem follows a set of rhythmic and musical patterns and other structural requirements that give it its beauty and make it different from ordinary speech.

That said, the new move towards modernising Somali versification has not succeeded to date to result in the creation of a new form of poetry free from the traditional rules of *xarafraac* and *miisaan*. This is in contrast to the case with other poetic traditions where similar trends led to the emergence of modern poetry free from the constraints of traditional rules. Let us take two examples from the neighbouring cultures. The first is the case of the Arabic versification. A heated debate, or what Mursi Saad El-Din (2003:2) refers to as 'the battle' raged in the Arab world since 1950s when a new generation of educated poets, led by Abdel-Wahab Al-Bayyati, Badr Shakir Asayyab, Amal Dunkul and others ventured to rebel against the traditional conventions of form and introduced a form of modern poetry free from the restrictions of the old structural techniques, namely, *al-wazn* (metre) and *al-qafiyah* (end rhyme). After many years of combat between the traditionalists and the modernists, the new style, often referred to as *Ashi'ir Al-hadith*, (modern

poetry) prevailed and was accepted by most poets and their audience and the debate took a new turn concentrating on the classical vs. colloquial. In this respect, Saad El-Din writes:

> The protagonists of classical poetry are opposed to the initiators of colloquial. The latter believe in the functional value of poetry. … They believe that it is life that determines the style, the form and the impulse of the poem. They do not believe in pouring new wine into old casks (El-Din, 2003:1).

The second example is the Swahili poetry of today in Kenya and Tanzania where the traditional form of versification is being challenged by an emerging group of 'university students writing in blank and free verse. It is a recent innovation … obviously influenced by modern English poetry, probably arises out of the desire of these young poets to react against the rigidity of the older but popular form' (Topan, 2004: 176). Farouk Topan, who welcomes the innovation as a positive development, mentions the emerging disagreement in Swahili literary circles concerning this new venture, pointing out how

> traditionalist scholars – staunch supporters of popular poetry – have already denounced this form as "non-Swahili". They fear that its acceptance as a bona fide form of Swahili poetry will not only dilute the composition of popular poetry but that it might even undermine it (Ibid).

Elsewhere in the world parallels are found in the history of European poetic traditions where the move to break with the traditional poetic form resulted in more substantial changes. Examples include the 16th century England, where blank verse was first introduced from Italy, and where again, at the beginning of the 20th century, many poets influenced by Whitman and Mallarmé, opted for free verse rejecting traditional regular metre – in much the same spirit as Milton had rejected rhyme.

In the case of Somali poetics on the other hand, the process of moving away from traditional form remains incomplete. The innovative ideas expressed since the 1970s have not gone as far as being reflected in the birth of free verse or the emergence of a new form of poetry free from the requirements of the customary *miisaan* and

xarafraac. Rather, the new trend expressed itself in two manifestations. The first was the aforesaid media debate on the need for a modern poetry free from *miisaan* and *xarafraac*. This move shrunk – for reasons discussed below – before leading practically to the desired changes in the target areas of Somali versification. The second area, in which the influence of modern environment was more fundamentally reflected, was the shift in the genre preference. In their response to the requirements of the new context and content (see chapter 2) Somali poets, rather than breaking with *xarafraac* and *miisaan* altogether, reduced the extent of fulfilling their requirements by opting for *beyd-gaab* genres which only need half the requirements of the *beyd-dheer* in alliterative words as well as in units of duration (see above for details). Taking further steps away from conformity to the customary form Somali transitional poets have parted with such old stylistic features as *luuq* and lavish introduction, as detailed in chapter 3.

The question that arises here is why in the Somali case the modern innovations have fallen short of leading to the development of a free verse or new forms equivalent to it? In other words, what are the reasons for the persistent presence of the traditional *miisaan* and *xarafraac* despite the attempted challenges described above? Several factors can be discerned. The first, in which the Somali experience differs from the others referred to above, lies with the nature of the medium of transmission. Unlike the poetic practices of languages such as English, Arabic and Swahili, for which writing is the primary medium of transmission, Somali is basically 'heard' poetry rather than 'read'. Even in modern times, with the Somali language written officially since 1972, writing is yet to become an established medium of transmission for Somali verse. It is often meant to be 'heard' from audio recording. Nowadays many poets do write down their verses when composing them but mainly for the purpose of remembering them until they have been electronically recorded. One minor exception is the new attempts made by young, educated poets who have started creating poetry meant to be transmitted through the internet (see Abdisalam, 2008 for details).

One has to bear in mind that writing is crucial for free verse to take off. In the experiences of languages such as English and Arabic the move to free verse

succeeded with the help of written representations of form such as the use of commas to create rhythm or the use of line breaks which allow for certain rhythmic and locally metrical effects to be set up.

The second reason was that the innovative drive in the field of literature seems to have been disrupted by the outbreak of the civil war in Somalia which led to the collapse of the state and society by the end of 1980s. The progress made towards modern transformations in Somali society since the 1930s, which had originally influenced the said literary flourishing and innovations (see chapter 2) suffered a catastrophic setback with devastating impact on all aspects of life. Consequently, the embryonic literary drive towards new forms of versification has ground to a halt.

As a third reason, closeness to tradition can be discerned as a factor. In post-colonial Somali society the influence of tradition is still stronger than that of modernity; more so among most poets who seem to be in need of more time to take bolder steps away from the traditional style of versification. The Somali transitional poet, however modern-oriented he may be, remains reluctant to break with the traditional metre and alliteration, especially in the field of *maanso-goleed*, probably for fear of the wrath of his audience who remain tethered to tradition. He seems unable to venture to introduce metre/alliteration-free verse maybe for fear of what Sir Richard Burton once described as 'their [Somali poetry lovers'] violent indignation' (Burton, 1894: 82). Even the young poet/scholars, who radically advocated for a free verse did not go as far as putting into practice what they called for in theory.

For instance, the foremost modernist, Maxamed Xaashi Gaarriye, was challenged by those critical of some of his ideas who asked him to compose a poem free from alliteration to substantiate or illustrate his new ideas, '*inuu tiriyo gabay aan qaafiyad lahayn oo tusaale ahaan u soo bandhigo*' (Khooli, 1976: 3). In response, Gaarriye (1976) summarised his answer with the use of the Somali proverb '*Salaadba waqtigeedaa la tukadaa*' by which he meant that everything has a time, implying that it was not time yet to do so, which made sense. The same was the case with the rest of the prominent, modernist poets, such as Maxamed Ibraahim Hadraawi, Siciid Saalax, Cabdulqaadir Yamyam, Cabdicasiis Daqarre and the others

who led the shift against certain stylistic features of the traditional form, including the *gabay* metre, but who seemed too tethered to the use of the established regular metre to break with it. According to Cali Sugulle (2010), the Somali poet still finds it difficult to venture breaking with *miisaan* and *xarafraac*, maybe for fear of being seen as not being gifted enough, i.e. as lacking 'the ability to meet the challenge of overcoming the difficult conditions of traditional versification' (Khooli, 1976:3).

4.5 Conclusion

From what has been discussed in the body of this chapter a number of important conclusions can be drawn. First, the two principal traditional devices that have always regulated Somali poetry, namely, *miisaan* and *xarafraac*, continue to govern Somali versification of the post-independence era, which extends to the present, as far as this study is concerned. Second, since the 1970s a new trend of dissatisfaction with the continued use of these old techniques as they stand emerged in Somali literary circles. Such a dissatisfaction was expressed in two forms: critical media debates and an increasing shift in the preference of certain metre types (see chapter 3).

The third conclusion is that post-independence Somali poets, in spite of their innovative attempt to alter the way in which different metre types were dealt with, have been unable thus far to part with the two main structural devices of *xarafraac* and *miisaan* and come up with an alternative form, as did poets in other languages. Several factors have been identified as being behind this (see above for details). Here, it is important to note that all of these factors appear to be of temporal nature. This means that once the situation has changed in the future and more experience has been gained, it may be predictable that the changes in the area of poetic structure, championed by innovators may start to emerge.

I hope to have provided in this chapter and in the preceding ones evidence supporting my central argument that the Somali poetry of the post-independence era is in a state of transition. It appears to be hovering between conforming to the traditional form, with which current poets have started to be dissatisfied yet still unable to part with, and aspiring to set off a new poetic form which has not

profoundly materialised as yet.

CHAPTER 5

BETWEEN CONTINUITY AND INNOVATION: TRANSITIONAL NATURE OF SOMALI POST-INDEPENDENCE DRAMA

5.1 Introduction

Having delineated the transitional nature of Somali Post-independence poetry in the preceding chapters I shall now turn to the investigation of post-independence Somali drama, the second leading form of modern Somali literature which is hypothised to share with the poetry the stated transitional status. In this chapter and the one that follows I shall look into the transitional characteristics of the post-independence Somali drama by examining two central facets of this art form. The first, which constitutes the subject of this chapter, is the creative tendency of post-independence Somali playwrights which demonstrates that they are transitional artists who respond to the pressures of a society in transition; they do so through creating plays mirroring this state of transition from the traditional way of life and of literary creation in which this art is rooted to the modern one from which it takes its inspiration, as we shall see shortly.

To investigate this, I shall look at a number of salient, traditional techniques used by the said playwrights to treat contemporary themes. They also use similar, traditional techniques in such aspects as characterisation, play production and the naming of both plays and characters. Secondly, in the next chapter I shall give an in-depth analysis of a representative play, namely the highly popular play *Shabeelnaagood* by Xasan Shiikh Muumin. In my analysis of the play I shall focus on a number of the main aspects of the play in which the chief characteristic of Somali post- independence drama as an art in transition may be manifest.

As indicated above, Somali dramatists of the post- independence era seem to be wavering between keeping with tradition and responding to modern influences. They seemingly strive to bridge the gap between the past and the present by incorporating elements which belong to both. They derive stylistic features from Somali oral tradition and transform them to fit the dramatisation of new themes, which respond to the pressures of contemporary social reality with its complex set of new social contradictions. It is interesting to observe that the transitional playwrights treat the conflicts and contradictions of modern life as dramatic conflicts with the use of traditional techniques familiar to their audience. I will illustrate this clearly in chapter 6. Here it is worth noting that Somali dramatists seem to share the above tendency with others in African theatre traditions such as Yoruba Travelling Theatre in Nigeria (Ogumbiyi, 1982; Etherton, 1982), Hausa theatre in Niger (Beik, 1987), the Concert Party in several West African countries (Kerr, 1995), and the Theatre for Social Conscietization in Kenya (Mwita, 2011).

The dual character of Somali dramatists in transition is not surprising when their background and mixed formation are taken into account. By mixed formation I mean that the majority of them were born and spent their childhood and early youth in a rural, mainly pastoral environment which had provided them with a wealth of background knowledge of Somali traditional culture. They then moved to the city for a better life. Kapteijns (1999: 16) describes how the burgeoning towns

> Attracted young Somali men (and to a lesser degree women) who took to the city temporarily (e.g., make money for bridewealth or recover from the consequences of draught or livestock disease) or opted out of the pastoral economy permanently.

Literary creators were part of such an influx. In towns they had to adjust themselves to a new way of urban life with more complex challenges; and it is the latter that gives their work the immediate inspiration.

Hence, By engaging in such a bridge-building creative practice, dramatists

contribute, on the one hand, to 'protecting Somali society against a split in its collective personality' (Andrzejewski, 1978:89), while, on the other, they endeavour to capture the moment, 'feeling the pulse of an age or of a moment in time' (Styan, 1975:11), to borrow a phrase from Styan who comments on the role of dramatists in general. This 'moment in time' was, in the case at hand, a moment of a multi-faceted transition, '*kala-guur'* (Cabdi Muxumed, 2006:48) as named by the late Somali poet-playwright Cabdi Muxumed Amiin (see chapter 1 for details).

5.2 Conflicting influences of the old and the new in earlier post-traditional literature

The conflict between the old and the new features prominently in both post-traditional Somali society at large and its literature. In real life the older generation have always lamented the collapse of traditional virtues, such as family values as they see them, and they accuse what they consider to be the evils of modern life (Cali [*Kalahaab*], 1966). Conversely, members of the younger generation complain about what they describe as *dhaqannada gaboobay*, (the old customs) and the rigid outlook of parents with conservative views towards issues such as marriage, love, family relations and fashion (Cali [*Sabre aa sed leh*], 1979). At a more serious level, the clash between the old and the new expresses itself in the serious conflict that often arises between the nepotistic clan mentality of people in decision-making positions and the requirements of a modern state and nation-building (Cabdi (*Qaran iyo Qabiil*], 1985). Such a duality is reflected in many works which belong to the post-traditional Somali literature created since the second quarter of the 20th century.

In the early 1930s, a young poet, Cilmi Boodheri (c. 1910-1941) gave expression to the strong sense of dissatisfaction felt by the younger generation of urban Somalis towards the established tradition. Cilmi, a famous poet who is said to have died of love, took issue in his poetry with his conservative or traditionalist relatives who had severely criticised his unusually liberal-minded and self-assertive expression of his overwhelming love for a girl called Hodon Cabdi. The concept of love as we know it today,

a major theme in Somali transitional theatre, was not commonly recognised or clearly expressed in Somali traditional society and the man-woman relationship was handled either in total privacy or, at the other extreme, through formal, even arranged marriage. That is why rebellious Cilmi was accused of being someone who is '*an waxba isku falayn oo aad uga gudubsan xeerka caadooyinka u ah dadka Soomaaliyeed* [a libertine extremely transgressing the accepted norms of Somali society]' (Rashiid, 1975: 37). To defend both the legitimacy of love and his own dignity, Cilmi made use of the medium of poetry, a powerful tool of communication in Somali society past and present:

> *Caashaqa haween waa horuu, Caaddil soo rogaye*
> *Sayidkii Cirshiga fuulay iyo, Caliba soo gaarye*
> *Carruurtay sideen meesha iyo, Ciise Nabigiiye*
> *Cidla' lagama beereen dadkoo, cuudi waaxida e*
> *Soomaalidaa caado xune, iguma caydeene* (ibid).
>
> Love for women was established by God;
> It was there in the times of the prophet[92] who rose to heaven and of Ali[93]
> Procreation was sustained through love since [the time of] Jesus the Prophet
> Without it human beings would not be there as one race.
> It is only because of the rigidity of Somali custom that you condemn me for it.

In his philosophical counter-attack reinforced by arguments based on religion, Cilmi therefore attributed the emerging conflict in the attitudes of the new society to the rigidity of Somali traditional world view.

In sharp contrast with Cilmi's views, another well known poet, Ismaaciil Mire (1862-1951), who was contemporary with Cilmi Boodhari but belonged to the older generation, denounced the modern Somali world of the time describing it as '*adduun gees u foorara*' [a world turned upside down] (Ismaaciil, 2007). In a famous poem with the above phrase as its title,

92 This refers to the ascension of Prophet Muhammad (cws).
93 Ali Bin Abi Talib.

Ismaaciil is so alarmed by the new developments that he seeks refuge in Allah from the evils of modern society, from what he considers unethical social behaviour that is certain to bring forth the wrath of Allah. The numerous transgressions or incongruous patterns of alien behaviour listed by the poet include the proliferation of bribery and the ultra-liberal conduct of the new generation of Somali women, 'the seductive girls of today' (ibid).

In a more neutral or more balanced approach, reflecting the dual nature of the new society, the two opposing attitudes were kept in equilibrium by a third, early 20th century poet and thinker, Cismaan Yuusuf Keenadiid. As noted by Cabdullaahi Farey (1996)[94], Cismaan represented in his poetry the clash (*is-hardi*) that was taking place between '*casrigii hore*' [the olden days] and '*casriga la galayey*' [the emerging new era] (Cabdullaahi, 1996). In his poetic craft, Cismaan skilfully utilised such innovative techniques as characterisation, dialogue and satirical humour. Using the medium of poetry as a forum for debate between the old and the new, Cismaan created several pairs of debating characters in a series of poems amusingly highlighting the then emerging social contradictions. The names of two of these pairs of characters are, respectively, Beydan and Xaliimo and Wiil (young man) and Shiikh Jamcaale (cleric). In the first pair (two women) Beydan represents the traditional women, while Xaliimo stands for the modern ones. The two denounce each other's behaviour and lifestyle. Xaliimo scorns the old-fashioned women, describing them as just blind house-wives, unable to move around, unaware of their rights, '*xaas meel yoxoobaad tihiin, oon xisaab galine*'. (Yaasiin, 1980: 79). In response, Beydan accuses modern women of transgressing the bounds of decency and the established rules of accepted social conduct, '*xeerkaan lahayn iyo sharciga*' (ibid, p. 80) in the name of a misconceived notion of freedom. The bottom line of her argument is that '*xornimada waxaad moodday, waa xil iyo ceebaale*' [What you

94 I gratefully acknowledge Cabdullahi Yuusuf Farey, a well known Somali actor, whom I met in Nairobi in October 1997 and who kindly gave me an audio cassette with poems composed by himself and others. The poems by Cismaan referred to below are included in this collection and were recorded with introductory comments by Cabdullaahi Farey. The texts are also available in Yaasiin, 1980.

perceived as “freedom” is nothing but disgrace] (ibid).

The argument between Wiil and Shiikh follows the same style, albeit in a different arena. Shiikh is a traditional Quranic teacher while Wiil is a modern school teacher. Their poetic combat is so interesting that it deserves quoting:

WIIL:
Cilmiga noo kordhiyo awgayow, camalka noo muuqda
Adduunka citibaaraha la yimi, ama cusboonaaday
Iyo caadka kaa saaran baan, la cajabaayaaye
. . . . . .
Cambuulada tacsida loo karshaad, cuni taqaaniine ....
Cashar iyo tahliil aad dhigtaad, calaf ka eegtaaye ....
Cilmiga aad u baro jaahilnimo, cudur xun weeyaane (Yaasiin,1980: 75 – 6).

Oh sheikh, I am surprised at how blind you are
To the enlightenment we’ve achieved
To the wonders of the new age and the horizons ahead of us
. . . . . .
You are only good at eating funerary *cambuulo*[95]
You depend on delivering *cashar* and *tahliil*[96] for a living ….
Learn properly because ignorance is a dreadful malady.

SHIIKH:
Wiilyohow adduun cirib xumaa, mana cusboonaane
Cudurrada uu leeyahay ninkii, caaqilaa garane
Codka aad i leedahayna waa, kii carruurnimo e
Casrigaad u bogi kaaga daran, caamonimadiiye
Wax cirkaa madow kuu jiraad, u cirba taaglayne (ibid, p. 77).

Oh lad, this era is one of decadence rather than renewal
Only the wise would understand its ills
You are only voicing childish views
The modernity you cherish is worse than the dark ages
You reach for something you will never achieve.

5.3 Innovators yet keepers of the word: transitional content of contemporary plays

Like Cismaan Yuusuf in this earlier poem, post-independence dramatists seek to

95 *Cambuulo* is boiled maize or sorghum served at funerals; it is also considered as one of the main dishes in certain rural areas in Somalia.

96 *Cashar* and *tahliil* are traditional religious treatments in which a man of religion writes some Quranic verses on a piece of wood, washes it off and gives the water to the patient.

incorporate in their plays the two opposing influences of tradition and modernity in a balanced fashion. This is not surprising given the fact that the Somali drama of the post-colonial period was born under these two opposing and equally compelling influences; namely, the patterns of the traditional oral culture of which the new art form is a direct descendant, and the pressures of rapidly changing modern realities from which it takes its immediate inspiration. Hence, the dichotomous mind-set of these transitional dramatists as is manifest in their plays (see below). One moment they are conservative guardians of the traditional cultural order, the next they are radical promoters of new ideals of modernisation, such as modern education and scientific medication, as well as the freedom of the individual and women's equal rights to men. On the one hand they rely on the traditional oral medium aided by some technological facilities (tape recording) in the production of their plays while on the other hand they incorporate modern elements, such as modern music and singing as essential components in the structure of their plays. As I mentioned in chapter 1, the whole phenomenon of a stage drama, with its acting on a raised platform for a seated audience, is considered an innovative development influenced by modern society and new-comer foreign models.

Playwrights often create dramatic tensions between two groups of characters, the first championing modern-oriented social change and the other defending the traditional way of thinking and living. While the first group blames the second for blocking the path of progress, the second accuses their opponents of blindly imitating destructive foreign habits and spreading indecent modes of behaviour: "You copy the customs of infidels, the enemies of our religion" (Macallin-ubbaale).

At times such a dual-natured inclination is observed in different plays by the same author; more interestingly yet, it is frequently found within the same play, as we shall see from the following examples.

The central theme of a famous play, *Kalahaab* (Wide Apart) by a celebrated playwright, Cali Sugulle (1966) was the devastating impact of certain aspects of

modern life style on the family. The plot is centred around the agonised life of the family of Ina Caateeye, a young civil servant whose family is destroyed as the result of his lifestyle (drunkenness, blind pursuit of bodily pleasures and so forth). He loses his job and separates from his nice wife, Deggan, who suffers, among other things, from her awareness that her husband, whom she still loves, deserted her to sleep with a young prostitute who, unlike Deggan, is happy to share with him his newly acquired habits of drinking and going to night clubs, both of which were considered as newly imported practices alien to the Somali, Muslim society. The playwright thus attributes the new social ills, such as alcoholism, prostitution and family disintegration, to the new-comer urbanisation and modernisation.

In other parts of the same play however the playwright demonstrates modern thinking by championing things like scientific medication which belongs to modern times. He fiercely criticises aspects of Somali tradition such as the traditional methods of medication where he ridicules the practices of certain individuals who claim "heavenly" powers to cure people who are ill only to exploit naive persons, in the playwright's view. He depicts this in the play through the character of Cutiya, mother of Ina Caateeye, who gives money to an old woman who claims spirit possession. She asks her to treat her drunken son. Being ignorant about alcohol and its effect the old woman thinks that her son suffers from an unknown illness.

Another example of the dual tendency of Somali playwrights is found in Xasan Shiikh Muumin's *Shabeelnaagood*. In certain parts of the play, Xasan is a devoted defender of Somali tradition. This is apparent from scene one where the playwright makes the whole cast declare, in a powerful song, that they are there to revive and preserve the heritage of their nation and to promote the virtues of the traditional way of life:

Taariikhda hiddaheenaan habaaska ka tirnaa
Hannaankii aan ku soo dhaqmeney baan u hiillinaa

We wipe the dust from our tradition,
We take sides with our traditional way of life.
(Hassan, 1974:44)

However, elsewhere in the same play the playwright clearly advocates modern issues of social progress such as formal education and the importance of the role of women in society.

The playwright's creation of the character of Diiddan, a righteous woman teacher, serves both purposes. Diiddan represents the new, modern woman, who is no more dependent on a man for her living and who, unlike Somali traditional women, is free from the fear of being socially unaccepted if she remains unmarried. Diiddan shows how this kind of liberated woman is able to play an important role in the new society; as a teacher, she provides her female pupils with guidance and knowledge which prevent them from becoming victims of the anti-social playboys, represented by the character of Shabeel the playboy. (See chapter 6 for details).

To provide a clearer picture of the presence of the combined influences of tradition and modernity in Somali post-independence drama and how the transitional nature of this art is manifest in such a duality, let us more closely look at the two aspects respectively one at a time.

Of the two opposing influences of tradition and modernity in Somali drama the first seems to be stronger. The playwrights' obvious inclination to defend what they see as their people's tradition is unmistakable. The influence of Somali oral tradition in this connection demonstrates itself in three main aspects. The first is the preservative tendency of the playwrights; i.e. their commitment to act as devoted guardians of the traditional values of their society against what they consider as evils of modernity (Cali Sugulle, 1966). The notion *dhaqan* (cultural heritage, including traditional virtues) features prominently in the content of virtually all post-

independence Somali plays of significance. '*Habran mayno oo dhaqanka waan u hawl galaynaa*!' [We shall toil for our heritage] (Hassan, 1974: 212-13) is the central mission statement or paradigm constantly sustained by Somali transitional dramatists. They repeatedly dramatise the ideal carried by the Somali saying, '*caado la gooyaa caro Allay keentaa*' [deserted custom brings forth the wrath of Allah].

The second aspect is the prescriptive and didactic orientation of the post-independence playwrights. One salient feature the bulk of Somali transitional plays have in common is their issue-orientedness, an orientation easily traceable to Somali classical oral poetry.[97] Like the classical poet, the transitional playwright always 'has a story to tell, often an argument to advance' (Said, 1982: 57). Despite that, the contemporary playwright endeavours to entertain his audience through such techniques as poetry, music and humour, his ultimate concern resembles that of the classical poet; that is 'to influence the opinions of others towards a certain vital issue' (Ibid.) The main preoccupation of a significant Somali playwright is to deliver an instructive message, '*Waxaan nahay macallimiinta bulsha-weynta* [We are the educators of the general public]', so declares a leading contemporary playwright, Cali Sugulle, in a video-recorded interview (Cali Sugulle, 1992). The third aspect which the influence of traditional culture is discernible in post-independence drama is the extensive use of materials and techniques carried over from Somali oral tradition; playwrights employ such traditional elements to dramatise modern issues of immediate relevance to contemporary society. Proverbs, oral poetry, words of wisdom and allusion to traditional narratives constitute the core of the said elements derived from oral tradition.

To further substantiate the first and most significant of the three aspects above, namely the playwrights' preservative tendency; I would like to discuss some more play samples illustrating how Somali playwrights tend to stand for their traditional culture.

A play called *Saddex baa isu faantay* (Three Contestants) by Xasan Cilmi Diiriye

97 For an elaborate discussion of the thesis-orientedness of Somali classical poetry, see Said, 1982: 70.

(1983), provides a fine example of how Somali contemporary playwrights strive to uphold the established culture (*dhaqan*), i.e., to keep with the customarily accepted pattern of behavior. The play also illustrates the use of traditional techniques in contemporary drama. The central theme of this play is the disastrous consequences of people's abandonment of their traditional values. In different parts of the play Xasan Cilmi reiterates the value of tradition stressing that people should keep with their heritage:

> *Qaran waliba dhaqankiisa*
> *Waa inuu ku dhaataa*
> *Summaddaada lama dheego*
> *Dhaxalkii adoogaana*
> *Mid la dhaafi karo maaha*
>
> Every nation cherishes
> Its cultural heritage
> You cannot disown your identity
> Nor can you abandon the heritage of your ancestors. (Quoted in Cabdalla, 2012).

The playwright refers to traditional values and way of life as '*wixii lagu faani jirey* [the things that people used to take pride in]', and '*wixii gaar u ahaayoo laga guurey haddeer* [what constituted our distinct identity that has now been abandoned]'. Towards the end of the play, the playwright exclaims, in the words of a young, reformed male character, Nabane Jooga, in a rather didactic song:

> *Wixii laga faani jirey ayaa lagu faanayaa!*
> *Wixii lagu faani jirey ayaa laga faanayaa*!
> We now take pride in what we used to abhor
> And we abhor what we used to take pride in (ibid).

Guided by the events of the play that led to this lamentation, the audience would easily conceive that at the centre of the '*what*' referred to in the first line above are the open transgressions of moral values in people's ruthless pursuit of material gains at any cost, and of bodily pleasures in total disregard of the traditional moral code of right and wrong. For example, a middle-aged mother, Naado, urges her marriageable daughter to be seductive in style and clothing and go out with well-off men 'who have cars and money'. Naado praises "brave" girls who maintain this pattern of

behaviour, which is utterly unacceptable from the point of view of Somali tradition.

In Cali Sugulle's *Kalahaab* (1966) the evening of a group of young clubbers dancing to modern Western music in a night club is spoiled by the unexpected interruption of a group of advocates of tradition who interrupt them and scornfully criticise their sensual movements and seductive clothing. They accuse them of blindly imitating foreign customs; they do so through funny, amusing poetic dialogue: *dameeri dhaan raacday baad tihiin* [You are just following along like donkeys]. In an attempt to provide an alternative, they try to persuade the clubbers into join them in a Somali traditional dance, *batar*, claiming that it fulfils everything required from a pleasurable dance in a night club. In response, however, the disturbed clubbers despise the conservative enthusiasts whom they see as backward country folks, *waan reer baadiyaha ah xaggay nagaga yimaadeen* , [where have these country hicks come to us from]?' (Scene 12.)

The way in which the playwright constructed the dialogue between the two groups clearly indicates that he takes sides with the defenders of tradition and is against the emergence of Western style clubbing in Somali towns, which was then a relatively new aspect of global modernity in Somali society. Instead, he advocates the preservation of traditional dance from the rural environment in urban entertainment.

In a highly popular play called *Hablayohow hadmaad guursan doontaan*! (O Girls, when will you get married!), which concentrates on the theme of marriage, the playwright, Maxamuud Tukaale (1975), is alarmed about the extent to which contemporary marriage has collapsed and points an accusing finger at modern influences as responsible for the unfamiliar crisis. The play opens with a group of marriageable girls coming across a homeless, aged women, Cirradaba (Daahir Caaje), sitting against a wall in a main road in the city. She looks utterly miserable and drunk and she is surrounded by equally miserable pieces of belongings: a dirty old basket used as a hand bag; torn pieces of clothing and, most significantly, some beer cans, mostly empty, and a bundle of *qat*[98] leaves. Shocked by the tragic state of

98 *Qat*, Catha Edulis, commonly called Arabic tea, is a stimulant narcotic used in the Horn of Africa

the old lady, the girls are tempted to ask her questions:

> 1ST GIRL: Oh my God! What happened to you, aunt?[99]
> 2ND GIRL: Don't you have a home, husband or children? What made you like this?
> CIRRADABA [*Sarcastically*]: I do have a husband, I have children, I have a home.
> 3RD GIRL: Thank God! Then tell us about them, aunt.
> CIRRADABA [*points to scattered leaves of qat*]: this is my home, my dear *qat*; then [*lifts a half-empty bottle of alcohol*] here is my husband, my soothing rum and gin! [*lights two cigarettes simultaneously*] and here are my children; you can see me burning them two by two!

Here, the message which the audience would pick up with ease is that as a young woman, Cirradaba had been too busy seeking momentary pleasures to think of a family and a future, until she found herself deserted at an old age, excluded and deprived of everything. In the playwright's view, she has fallen victim to the new-comer ills of modernity. In another twist, the play depicts how family life in modern Somali society is destroyed by materialism and selfish individualism. Cawo, a young wife obsessed with partying drives her once well-off husband to bankruptcy by overspending on organising continuous, expensive parties and overseas holidays to keep the image of being seen as a modern lady. Worse yet, when Cawo realises that her husband has run out of money, she abandons him in his solitary grief. In contrast with Xasan Shiikh Muumin in *Shabeelnaagood*, who places most of the blame on townsmen, Maxamuud Tukaale, in *Hablayohow*, blames, in most part, the new generation of urban women blinded with materialism as well as by misconceived freedom.

In the preceding discussion, the firm stand of Somali playwrights in favour of maintaining the cultural status quo may give the impression that they are adamant traditionalists or conservative 'keepers of the word' who reject modern developments. This however is not always the case. In fact, a close look at the work of these artists suggests that they are as well liberal advocates of social progress and

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and the Arabian Peninsula.

99 Younger Somalis call and older woman *eeddo* and an older man *adeer* to show respect.

modernity and critics of many aspects of the old cultural order.

In many plays dramatists fiercely attack what they consider as shackling remnants of the past (Cali, 1979); they denounce aspects of the tradition which, in their view, pose serious hurdles to progress, and which 'do not ensure achievement' (Hassan, 1974: 215).

The modernist views expressed in the Somali drama in transition came initially as part of the nationalist drive of the 1950s - 60s in Somalia, as asserted by Lidwien Kapteijns (Kapteijns, 2011). Professor Kapteijns identifies a number of dimensions of such a modern-oriented tendency expressed in post-World War II Somali literature. Aspects of such a modern orientation include a liberal belief in constitutional democracy; promotion of individual rights and freedoms, including equality before the law; social progress derived from formal, modern education based on European models; and economic development driven by scientific and technological means. Somali playwrights of the post-colonial period championed in their plays all these ideals. In addition, they advocated women's emancipation, romantic love and companiate marriage.

On the other hand, among what the dramatists present as negative aspects for Somali social life in which they blame tradition, three stand out: (i) clannism; (ii) the patriarchal system or male chauvinism which undermines women's rights, both as wives and daughters, and (iii) superstition. The following passage from the play *Shabeelnaagood* provides an example of how Somali plays attack the above remnants of the past and champion social reform:

> Vainglory, tribalism, and pride in ancestry do not ensure achievement,
> The toil that is one's lot, the inherent troubles
> Unless one goes out to face them, one will perish through them in time (p. 213).

In an even more direct poetic pronouncement, the late poet-playwright Cabdi Muxumud Amiin, in a famous poem called '*Geeddiga Wadaay*' [Continue the Journey] (mid-1960s), voices the new trend, urging Somalis to free themselves from

the shackles of the regressive worldview of the past – i.e., clannism – to be able to cope with the new age of technology where nations compete to conquer outer space:

Dadkii nala gudboonaa	Our equals [other nations]
Dayaxuu u guuroo	Have moved to the moon
Nin qabiil gargaarsadey	Alas, he who relied on clannism
Meella gaadhi maayee	Gets nowhere (Cabdi, 2006: 12).

A similar attack on the evils of clannism inherited from the past was the central theme of one of the most popular Somali plays produced in Djibouti mid-1980s, entitled *Qaran iyo Qabiil* (Nation and Clan), by Cabdi Miiggane (1985). An important state enterprise (which may be seen as symbolising the state) collapses because of the vices of its executive director, Samadiid (he-who-rejects-good). He is blinded by clan mentality despite his higher education gained in a European country. He runs the public agency as though it was a private business in which he only represents the interests of his own clan, rather than that of the nation. The result is a disaster– both the enterprise and the life of Samadiid are ruined at the end of the play.

Characterisation is another important area where the transitional feature of Somali post-independence drama is apparent. The transitional nature of the plays is reflected in the characters peopling them; they too seem to be transitionals. One main trait which these characters have in common is their divided personalities. They are torn between two conflicting sets of pressures; i.e. between loyalty to the clan or to the state; between identifying themselves with their kinsmen or with their colleagues in the workplace; between keeping up with religious instruction or indulging in the newly emerged pleasures; between complying with the traditional norms of the family and responding to the irresistible appeal of an "unauthorised" love as free individuals; and so on. It is this kind of conflict and self-dividedness, which exists in real life, both inside individual persons as well as in the transitional society at large, that inspires the dramatic conflict in the transitional plays, and the playwrights dramatise them in the form of conflicts between characters or within a character.

Shoobto, the heroine of a play called S*abre aa sed leh*, (Reward is with those who forbear) by Cali Cusmaan Darook (1979) is a good example of a self-divided

character torn between traditional and modern influences. Her suffering generates from her being under equally compelling pressures pulling her in opposing directions. She is in love with a young man, Shooble, and wants to marry him; in doing so, she follows a new trend among girls of her generation who believe that a marriageable girl has the right to choose her future husband. Her female friends always encourage her to feel free to do whatever she feels is best for her. On the other hand however, she is aware that, according to custom and her family tradition, she is not allowed to get into a relationship with a man, let alone falling in love with him or trying to marry him outside the customary arrangements through her father. Worse yet, the man she loves is from a clan considered as an enemy to her clan, and her family has already started planning for an arranged marriage between her and a man who relates to them in conformity to the custom. She hates that man but cannot disobey her family who belong to the Benadiri community who tend to strictly keep with their conservative customs in when it comes to marriage and family relations.

Thus, Shoobto suffers from a strong inner conflict; she also suffers from an uncompromising pressure by her family. She becomes a victim of a divided loyalty between her family and their rigid custom on the one hand, and her passionate love for Shooble, reinforced by her modern outlook or her belief in the person's right to be free for matters affecting his/her private life on the other. Confused and unable to take a bold decision, Shoobto expresses her dilemma in a moving song, from which we cite the following lines:

> *Ardiga nuurkiisa, uurkey arwaaxiisa us lee waaye*
> *Araggiis minaan waayaa, illintey bexeeysaa!*
> *Meel habkey jiro, oo habartey ka roon maan u aadaa?*
> *Hadal beena aad haysiin iyo hawadiina dheeraa*
> *Ardiga aaran ma leh, us minaan arkeyninba awaar waaye*! (Cali, 1979).
>
> He is the light of the land, the joy of my bosom
> If I lose sight of him my tears follow!
> But is there a better place for me to go than where my kinsmen are and my mother?
> You are talking nonsense, about a false pride which cannot work.
> There is no prosperity in the country if I do not see him: there is only drought.

In his portrayal of Shoobto, the playwright, Cali Cismaan Darook, shows us that members of the younger generation of Somalis suffer from a bitter feeling of uncertainty and inner conflict; this is due to their being at the threshold of two eras: they sway half-way between conforming to the traditional world outlook of their parents and grandparents and getting out of its ghetto. The first half is depicted in Shoobto's words: 'is there a better place for me to go than where my kinsmen are?', which clearly indicates that she still believes in the unquestionable loyalty to one's clan and family, a characteristic attitude of a typical clan member in traditional Somali society.

To highlight the second half of such self-divided or transitional individuals, the playwright swiftly changes the mood of our heroine. In the same soliloquy, Shoobto suddenly turns against her family, accusing them of suppressing her aspirations, under the pretext of safeguarding customs that are, in her view, not workable in a modern context–'a false pride which cannot work'. At a certain level, Shoobto still believes in aspects of traditional outlook, while on the other hand she feels dissatisfied with others, and even with the latter, she is not quite clear about what is best for her to do.

5.4 Use of traditional techniques in plays with modern themes

As stated earlier, Somali transitional playwrights extensively use techniques and artistic elements inherited from Somali oral tradition such as proverbs, words of wisdom, alliteration and allusion to folk tales. They use these techniques in the dialogue construction and dramatic building as well as in naming both plays and characters. The Somali dramatist tends to pay much attention to the naming of his play.[100] He tries hard to find an attractive title which in the meantime conveys the essence of the play[101] with the understandable conviction that a good title is an essential element for the success of any play.

In their pursuit of such appealing titles, Somali dramatists make use of the traditional

100 I use the male pronoun throughout this study, the reason being that the Somali plays under discussion are created by men except for a few cases.

101 For further details see Andrzejewski, 1974: 5.

elements listed above which are familiar to the Somali audience. Examples are the names of the two famous plays: *Miyi iyo Magaalo*, (Country and Town) by Cabdillaahi Farey, 1959; and *Jinni iyo Jacayl*, (Jinn and love) by Xasan Ganey, 1975. Traditional alliteration is used in both. The two main words in each title alliterate with each other in *m* and *j* respectively.

Titles of many plays are even more sophisticated in their use of traditional features – they

combine a complex blend of stylised elements; for example, the title of a play by a foremost Somali musician, Maxamuud Ismaaciil "Xudeydi" (1969), was *Macal-cune Muuqan doone*. In common with most titles of Somali plays, the name of this play defies accurate translation. The use of a nomadic metaphor adds to the difficulty in finding appropriate English words to translate all the shades and hidden meanings of this title.

Macal-cune muuqandoone literally means, 'he who eats [secretly] the fat part of a sheep's neck[102] will be exposed [eventually]'; (i.e. the kind of fats he ate are such that are certain to make him sick). Originally, this was a proverb warning those who indulge in cheating people, thinking that they will be able to get away with it. The play was composed and staged in the late 1960s, the heyday of Somali satirical drama, the dominant theme of which was social and political criticism. The Somali audience of the time, who shared with the playwright both the background knowledge alluded to and the political attitude critical of the government, were able to unravel the coded message conveyed by this title; they would understand that by 'he' the playwright meant the ruling elite who, on the eve of general elections, were dishonestly competing for personal gains (power and wealth), putting the future of the whole nation in jeopardy.

Among the complex techniques combined in this title are alliteration and familiar imagery drawn from the Somali pastoral environment, all these have effectively been

102 'The fat part of the sheep's neck' symbolises the greater portion of a shared property.

squeezed into two single words of immense power.[103]

That said, I must point out that there are plays in which the playwrights do not concern themselves with alliterative titles. Even in this case, however, alternative traditional techniques are often present. The title chosen by Maxamed Jaamac "Ilka-case" for a play he composed in 1968 was *Reer ba'ow yaa ku leh!* 'O, wrecked household, to whom do you belong!'.[104] The play is about an impoverished, half-nomad family being victimised by a corrupt, powerful businessman.

In this title alliteration has not been used. Instead, the author has employed a different set of equally effective elements from Somali oral tradition. He has used a well-known popular expression structured in a moving exclamatory form meant for extra emphasis. This familiar expression is so powerful that it could be enough to intensify the effect which the playwright aims to achieve; that is to create a sense of tragedy which leads to the condemnation of the destructive behaviour of the villain, the immoral businessman. The situational image (of a wrecked household) drawn with the use of a familiar allusion, and the intensity of the condensed vocabulary (lost in the translation) is such that makes this title a key element in the success of the whole play, both in terms of pulling crowds and getting its message across.[105]

Examples from some earlier plays created communally are *Maseer,* 'Jealousy' (1946),[106] *Ijo-fool-dheer,* '*Ijo*-the long-toothed' (1946),[107] and *Jahli* 'Ignorance' or *Al-*

103 The text of this play is only available in manuscript held by the playwright who was generous enough to lend it to me for a short period of time. He also gave me an interview in London on 27 March 2010 which included an explanation of aspects of this play including the background. I am grateful to him for his generosity.

104 The storyline of this play and substantial parts of its content together with analysis and a brief biography of the playwright are found in Deeq, 2007.

105 In an interview I had with Maxamuud Ismaaciil Xudeydi who was a leading member of the cast, Xudeydi confirmed to me that the play was actually successful on both counts. He also told me that it was composed by Ilka-case.

106 For more information about this play see Maxamed Daahir, 1987.

Ab Al-jahil 'The Ignorant father' (1947).[108] More recent plays with similar titles include *Carraweelo*[109] (Xudeydi, 1961), *Caliyow* (anonymous, 1963) and *Aw-Bustaale* (Cismaan Aadan, 1978). These plays are all named after their chief characters.

Finally, some Somali plays have simple, straight-forward titles; examples are *Soomaalidii hore iyo Soomaalidii dambe* (The Somalis of the past and those of the present) by Xuseen Aw Faarax, 1954; *Geeddigii koowaad* (The first journey) by Xasan Cilmi Diiriye, 1974; and *Boqoraddii Jacalyka*, (Queen of love) by Daahir Nuur "Dator Raafi", 1978.

It is noticeable that the translation of a play title of this type is not difficult, unlike those cited earlier. The shared knowledge and cultural background between the playwright and his Somali-speaking audience facilitates the acquaintance with such complex titles on the part of the Somali spectator, the only target recipient that the playwright is likely to have in mind. The real difficulty arises when one attempts to translate this kind of titles into English or other foreign languages.

For example, such a difficulty was faced by the late Professor Andrzejewski in his attempt to translate the title of the play *Shabeelnaagood*. In his struggle to find adequate English translation for this 'vague neologism' as he refers to it, he had to turn to the author himself as well as to other Somali cultural consultants for explanation (see Andrzejewski, 1974: vii, 35). In spite of all these efforts, Professor Andrzejewski has ended up suggesting two parallel translations rather than one: *Leopard Among the Women* on the title page of the book and *Women-hunting leopard* in the text' (Ibid: 35). Of the two, the latter is closer to the literal meaning of the compound word*;* yet it does not capture the nuances of the Somali. The word 'leopard' here does not refer to a real leopard. The title is a neologism which embodies very deep allegorical meaning which would better translate freely 'lady

107 See notes by Ibraahim Meygaag Samatar, a participant in the performance, in Andrzejewski Collection (AC) at SOAS library.

108 More information about this play is provided by Yuusuf Xaaji Aadan in an audio recorded interview I had with him in London on 10 May 1996.

109 For notes on both *Carraweelo* and *Caliyow*, see Andrzejewski, 1974: 5.

killer'. Andrzejewski first other translation, *Leopard among the women* does not convey the intended meaning of the neologism *shabeelnaagood*. If one attempts to translate this back into Somali, it would translate '*shabeel naagaha ku dhex jira'*, which is not the intended meaning of '*shabeelnaagood*'. I would therefore prefer to use 'lady killer' in this study, wherever the translation of the title is needed. In most cases however, I will be using the original Somali.

The origins and the grammatical formation of the name *Shabeelnaagood* is best elucidated in the words of Andrzejewski:

> Grammatically, it is a regular masculine noun formed from two roots, *shabeel* 'leopard' and *naag* 'woman', with the plural genitival ending *ood.* It is formed on analogy with a now obsolescent compound, *orginaagood,* 'he-goat of (*or* for) women' which denotes a young man who is good at singing and dancing at mixed gatherings, where he acts as leader and takes the initiative in persuading the girls to dance." (Andrzejewski, 1974: 35).

The 'women-hunting leopard' indicated in the play's name, is the chief character, Shabeel, a cunning playboy whose main preoccupation is to 'hunt' and seduce as many inexperienced girls as he can find, eventually ruining their lives by destroying them sexually, socially and psychologically (see chapter 6).

The naming of characters is another area where the use of techniques drawn from oral tradition is paramount. Among such techniques alliteration is the most prominent. In almost all transitional plays, significant characters have alliterative names. Playwrights often give to their characters descriptive names invented to suggest the role played by a given character in the play, as did Arthur Miller in naming the main characters of his famous play, *The Death of a Salesman* or Charles Dickens in such novels as *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield*.

The names of the two chief characters in *Shabeelnaagood*, Shabeel (the heartless playboy) and Shallaayo (his female victim), are not only alliterative with each other (have the same initial *sh* sound), they are both meaningful and their allegorical meaning is organically related to the essence of the plot. The direct meaning of

‘Shabeel’ is ‘leopard’ and it is used as male nickname, even, sometimes, as a real name. Figuratively, however, it is used (often in informal situations) to describe a man who is a trickster or artful in achieving selfish goals. Thus, Xasan has given this name to the chief character of his play to suggest his role as a cunning women-hunter.

The other name, Shallaayo, which means ‘she-who-repents’ is a more straightforward descriptive name derived from the root *shallaay* (to repent). Unlike the former name, Shabeel, which is an existing name in Somali vocabulary, as explained, Shallaayo is a neologism created by the playwright to summarise the role of this seduced girl who was set to remain repentant for the rest of her life about the day she said ‘yes’ to Shabeel’s deceptive proposal. By using such a name for such a character, the playwright aims to highlight his rather didactic pronouncement, the play’s central message to girls around the age of Shallaayo, saying to them in just one word: do not do what she has done or you will *repent* it like her!

In Somali plays, alliterative names are sometimes given to members of the whole cast and sometimes only the main characters whose roles in the plot are closely related; like two characters in a couple or in a pair of contrasting characters (e.g., Samadiid and Siciid in *Qaran iyo Qabiil*). The technique of alliterative coupling described earlier is often used here and *Shabeelnaagood* provides a vivid example. There are four leading characters in the play – two males and two females – and they are grouped into two couples. The names of each couple alliterate with each other.

The first couple consists of Shabeel and Shallaayo, around whom the principal plot centres. The second couple is Diiddane and Diiddan who lead the events of the supplementary plot.

Alliterating in *d*, the inventive names of the two latter characters have even closer links; they have the same formation and the same meaning which indicates the similar roles of the two characters in the play – they both take a firm stand against the state of affairs in their society. They serve mainly as a choral voice against the prevailing socio-political vices. To make such a role evident from the names of the characters, who jointly play it, the playwright has formed the alliterative coupling,

‘Diiddane’ and ‘Diiddan’, ‘He-who-rejects’ and ‘She-who-rejects’ respectively, as descriptive neologism.

One more example of alliterative coupling in other plays is the names of Barni (girl's name) and Burhaan (her lover), the two main characters of a romantic play, *Boqoraddii Jacaylka*, (Queen of Love) by the late poet-playwright, singer and medical doctor, Daahir Nuur “Datoor Raafi”.[110]

In the instances where the names of members of the whole cast are alliterative, one good example is found in *Qaran iyo Qabiil* ‘State and Clan’ (Cabdi, 1985). Here the names of the significant characters are Siciid, Sucaad, Samadiid, Suubban, Suge and Safiya, all alliterating in *s*. All of these names, except for one (Samadiid) are real names used in real life. However, there are cases where such alliterative names are all invented by the playwright, like the case of a play called *Dirqi Maaha Jacaylku*, ‘Love cannot be forced’, by Maxamed Aadan Dacar, (1978); the names of the main characters in this play are Miyir, Murjin, Mawaahib, Marwo, Mastar, Maydhaan, and Muruq.[111]

Sometimes the name of the play as well as the names of the characters share the same alliterative sound. A serious play called *Dhulkeenna dhibaha ka jooga*, (The troubles in our land), by Cali Ibraahim Iidle (1968) illustrates the use of this technique. Here, we find that the initial sound of retroflex *d* (rendered by *dh* in Somali orthography) extends from the alliterative title of the play to the names of all the characters who are called Dhamac, Dhiirran, Dhiillaside, Dhalanteed, Dhogor, Dhaxalmaal, Dharaar, Dhuxul, Dhudi, and Dhaqde.[112] Again, most of these are descriptive names invented by the playwright (see Andrzejewski in Hassan, 1974).

5.5 Production methods in transition

In this section I shall explore the presence of transitional elements in the production methods of the post-independence Somali plays. The results of my research suggest

110 For a summary of the plot of this play together with a detailed analysis of the play see Maxamed, 1987: 202ff.
111 For a critical study of this play see Maxamed 1987: 194.
112 See Andrzejewski, 1974: 6 for comments on this play.

that, like the post-independence poets described in chapter 2, the post-independence playwrights also make use of a blend of old and new methods and means in the production of their plays. Some of these methods emulate Somali oral tradition while others are modern innovations or the result of foreign influence, as we shall see shortly. The similarity here is not surprising when one takes into account the fact that Somali poets and playwrights remarkably overlap, and that poetry often constitutes a prominent component of a Somali play. The majority of the playwrights are poets as well, or in other words, it is mostly the poets that lead the creation of Somali plays. Therefore, much of the situation described in chapter 2 in relation to poetry transmission methods is applicable to the production of drama. One main difference is that in the case of the latter the central medium of dramatic transmission is acting on the stage, with the use of a variety of visual tools not required for the separate transmission of poetry.

In the production of his play the Somali playwright employs a blend of conventional orality and new techno-orality aided by a limited use of writing.[113] Orality and the traditional way of communal creation (see below) seem to be central aspects of this process. Another traditional device extensively employed by the playwright in the creation and the delivery of his play is alliterative verse (Andrzejewski, 1978). On the other hand, modern technology, especially audio-visual recording[114] and modern sound systems, play an increasingly prominent role. The use of modern music using Western instruments has also become an integral part in the production and performance of the post-independence Somali play. Another innovative tool increasingly utilised by playwrights, albeit far less significantly, is writing, more so since the introduction of the official script for the Somali language in 1972 . The way in which such an amalgam of old and new methods and means works for post-independence Somali dramatists is best explained in the words of Andrzejewski, who writes,

> Until October 1972 Somali had no official orthography and most actors, even if educated through the medium of foreign languages,

113 See chapter 3 above for explanation of my conception of 'techno-orality'.

114 For more information about the importance of cassette tapes in the transmission and preservation of Somali performing arts in the post-independence period, See Said, 1989; and Ali, 1996.

> have not been able to read their own; consequently, they have had no scripts from which to learn their roles and have had to memorize them from the oral delivery of the playwright, a tedious process which has, however, in recent years been much simplified by the use of tape recorders. Most, though not all, playwrights have used some form of private system of writing Somali, which usually only they themselves have been able to read, and even that very slowly. . . . A large part of a typical play is composed in alliterative verse. . . . It is only these parts that are written down in the playwright's notes; the prose sections are simply explained to the actors in general terms and they then invent their own lines to suit the requirements of the plot. In performance, the actors are expected to reproduce as faithfully as they can the poetic parts of the play word for word. As for the parts in prose, they are allowed to alter their dialogue as they like, as long as this does not distort the trend of the play. There are in fact very substantial variations in the wording of the prose dialogue from performance to performance. (Andrzejewski, 1974: 3-4)

Unlike people from writing-oriented traditions, who would first put on paper whatever they want to record or deliver, the majority of Somali dramatists tend to do the recording of their rehearsal materials right from their oral memory. One main exception is the poetic parts which many playwrights read from their often rough drafts on paper, as Andrzejewski has explained; hence, the centrality of a mixture of primary orality and techno-orality in the production process (Xasan Shiikh Muumin, 1997; Cali Sugulle, 2010), with limited use of writing.

In an interview I had with Cabdi Muxumed Amiin (Cabdi Muxumed, 2002), a well known playwright and actor since the early 1960s, he explained what happens in a typical production and rehearsal process.[115] Individual pieces of composition in the play (e.g., a lyrical piece, a piece of music or of poetic dialogue etc.) have to be instantly tape recorded. The play making process begins with sessions attended by all the members of the performing troupe, led by the playwright/director,[116] commonly known in Somali as *mu'allif* (author). In the first session the *mu'alllif* verbally explains the central idea of the new play he has in mind. He further explains what he thinks would be a general framework for the plot. Then the members of the troupe engage in a critical discussion where almost everyone

115 I have also cross-checked with another celebrated playwright, Cali Sugulle, who has confirmed the same in a later interview I had with him (Cali, 2010). This is also analogous to my own personal experience in the field.

116 In Somali theatre tradition the playwright often plays the role of the director as well.

contributes something. In this initial session and subsequent ones the idea is collectively developed, may be changed altogether, the actual plot constructed and the role of each actor determined, all in a communal, participatory manner. After that the playwright/director, begins the composition and the tape recording of the poetic parts of the play, with assistance from one or two aides. In the next step the playwright would deliver the poetic pieces on tape recording to both the actors and the music writer or rather, music composer (as he does not use written notes), known in Somali as *mulaxin*. The latter starts to put the lyrics composed by the playwright into music and then delivers them, tape recorded, back to the group. The actors and singers or actors-singers start learning by heart the poetic texts of their respective roles from the audio recordings. In more recent times, literate actors-singers use written texts as well. Meanwhile the *mulaxin* leads the orchestra/musicians in their preparation and rehearsals of the musical components of the play.

The rehearsals are then set in motion under the leadership of the *mu'allif*. More often than not, substantial amendments and improvements are made by the cast during the rehearsals. Although a play should normally be based on a theme and a plot outlined by an individual playwright, who leads the creation and production process, the final product of a full length Somali play is the result of painstaking efforts and substantial modifications collectively made by almost all the members of the cast or of the entire troupe.[117]

Cabdi Muxumed (ibid) described how, during rehearsals, an idea would flash in the mind of a member of the cast who would enthusiastically interrupt the *mu'allif*, saying: 'sug, sug, baarkaan iigu dar!' 'hold on, hold on, include this scene for me!' Another well known actor, Cabdullaahi Yuusuf Farey, one of the main actors in the play *Shabeelnaagood* – analysed in the next chapter – pointed out, in an interview I had with him (Cabdullahi, 1997) that they, the actors, had worked hard together for many days, developing the play with the *mu'allif*, Xasan Shiikh Muumin, in such a

117 The well known actor and musician, Saalax Qaasim Naaji, was one of the Somali theatre practitioners who have confirmed this to me in a conversation I had with him in London on 8 November 2008.

way that had modified substantially the verbal synopsis originally put forth by the playwright. Likewise, Xasan Shiikh Muumin (1997) himself relates the story of how they (Radio Mogadishu Troupe) communally created one of Cali Sugulle's best known plays, *Dab iyo Dhagax*, 'Fire and Stone' (1966); and how they then decided to attribute it to Cali who had suggested the theme with a general outline.

At the end of the rehearsals the completed play is performed on the stage, which more or less resembles a modern Western stage. On stage the actors, who improvise the prose parts of the play, constantly make new contributions and additional polishing in each performance through their improvised dialogue and movements. Indeed, the success of any play heavily relies on what we can describe as the performers' spur of the moment, 'the wit and humour' which result from 'the mastery of verbal medium on the part of actors' (Andrzejewski, 1974: 7).

From the above discussion we can see the mixed influences of tradition and modernity in the production of post-independence Somali drama. Reliance on orality is an obvious carryover from Somali oral tradition, where it was the sole medium at the disposal of poets and other literary creators. Similarly, the practice of communal creation is inherited from Somali traditional performers, in art forms such as dance performances, as well as other verbal arts outside the *maanso-goleed*. Another carryover from Somali oral tradition is the use of alliterative and metrical verse, with the aim to facilitate the memorisation of the important aspects of the literary work in the absence of writing. On the other hand, examples of modern innovations and foreign influence are the use of the products of new technology (tape recording etc.), instrumental music of Western origin and the beginnings of writing. The very idea of producing a full length play and performing it on a modern stage, with a raised platform, microphones, curtains and seated audience, is a paramount innovation which comes from the influence of modern life and that of foreign experiences.

Thus, the joint presence of the old and the new in such a conspicuous fashion indicates the transitional state of the production methods of post-independence Somali drama, and this in turn can be seen as one of the main aspects of this drama

which demonstrate its nature as an art in transition.

5.6 Conclusion

The results of the investigation discussed in the body of this chapter lead to the conclusion that the Somali drama of the post-independence period shares with the poetry the characteristic feature of being an art in transition. It appears to be transitional first in the sense that it reflects the realities and challenges of a society passing through a period of transition from traditional way of life to a modern one. Secondly, the main features of this drama demonstrate that it is an art which is itself going through a passage from the traditional way of artistic creation to an innovative one responding to the requirements of modern life.

One of the main aspects presented in the chapter in which the said transitional nature is manifest is the way in which playwrights treat the themes of their plays. I have discussed various samples from plays in which traditional materials and techniques are skilfully employed to dramatise themes dealing with issues and contradictions which characterise modern society. Another major aspect of this drama in which the mixed influences of tradition and modernity is evident is the production method presented in the preceding section. All these clearly demonstrate this drama is in a transitional passage between being traditional and modern; hence, the continued presence of influence from the Somali oral tradition of which this drama is a direct descendant and that of modern life from which it takes its immediate inspiration and increasingly attempts to adjust itself to its requirements.

A more detailed analysis which substantiates this central argument will be provided in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

TRANSITIONAL NATURE OF SOMALI POST-INDEPENDENCE DRAMA AS OBSERVED IN THE PLAY *SHABEELNAAGOOD*

6.1 Introduction

The Somali play, *Shabeelnaagood,* (Women-hunting Leopard)[118] is described by B. W. Andrzejewski (1974: vi) as 'a fine example of the genre [i.e. Somali drama]'. We may go one step further to point out that *Shabeelnaagood* is a fine example of the Somali drama under discussion, namely the drama of the post-independence period, with the observed characteristic feature of being in transition, a characteristic it shares with the post-independence poetry discussed in the previous chapters. In this play we find significant evidence supporting the central argument in this thesis that the post-independence Somali literature represented by drama and poetry is considered an art in transition. This chapter focuses on the analysis of a number of important aspects of this play, aspects in which the transitional nature of the play, and of the Somali post-independence drama by extension, is manifest. These aspects include the themes, the characters and the techniques of the play. Most obviously, the transitional nature of this play is discerned in two prominent features on which I shall place special emphasis for this reason. The first is the message-focussedness of the playwright and the second is that he skilfully employs a wide variety of traditional techniques to dramatise topical themes. While the themes of the play deal with issues pertinent to modern life, their message-orientedness is a tendency carried over from Somali traditional literature, as will be elucidated below. In his dramatic treatment of topical issues, the playwright extensively employs proverbs, riddles and allusion to sources of oral tradition. Added to this is the playwright's heavy reliance on traditionally-styled, alliterative verse in expressing the central ideas in the play. All these techniques are unmistakably drawn from Somali oral tradition.

118 See chapter 6 for details on the translation of this title.

All of the above statements will be substantiated and illustrated in the main body of the chapter. First, however, to facilitate the grasp of the forthcoming analysis of *Shabeelnaagood* I shall start with a brief background to the play and its author followed by a synopsis of the plot.

6.2 Brief background and a synopsis of the plot

Shabeelnaagood was first produced in late August - early September 1968 and staged at the National Theatre in the Somali capital, Mogadishu by the of Radio Mogadishu Troupe, the leading theatre company at the time, of which the playwright was a member. Most actors were professional artists working for the state-owned Radio Mogadishu. So were the members of the orchestra who provided the musical accompaniment that constituted an important component in the play. The production processes followed the communal, non-script-based methods often used by Somali transitional dramatists (see Andrzejewski, 1974 for details). After several, crowd-pulling nights (Andrzejewski 1974:vi; Xasan, 1997) the production was taken on a long provincial tour throughout the country.

The live performance of the play was followed by a radio serialisation through the national radio station, Radio Mogadishu, where an audio-recorded version of the play was aired. The BBC Somali Service too did the same, later and aired the whole play in a series of programmes. In addition, the play was widely circulated on audio cassettes recorded by enthusiasts either from radio broadcasts or from live performances.

Moreover, *Shabeelnaagood* was exceptionally lucky to be the only Somali play translated into English and published in a book which combined both the Somali version and the English translation together with an illuminating introduction by the late Professor Andrzejewski who translated the play. It was published by the Oxford University Press in 1974. The version that has been translated was a transcript of the tape recording of one of the many performances of the play, one which was performed on 1 September 1968 (Andrzejewski, 1974: 29).

It is this publication (Hassan, 1974), together with a tape recorded version of the play that I have used as principal sources for the present study of the play. As additional sources, I have used the output of three different interviews I had respectively with the playwright in Borama (Xasan, 1997) and two of the significant actors of the play, namely, Cabdullaahi Farey (Cabdullaahi, 2000) and Cabdi Muxumed Amiin (Cabdi Muxumed, 2002). Moreover, I was privileged in that I had the opportunity to attend the performance of *Shabeelnaagood* at the Mogadishu National Theatre in September 1968; I attended it two subsequent nights–as we often did these days as school boys–and I still have a vivid memory of what we witnessed.

It is interesting here to note that since the performance of this play in 1968, the neologism 'Shabeelnaagood' has become an established popular expression in everyday speech in Somalia as an informal description of the cunning townsmen who, like Shabeel the antagonist, are particularly skilled in trapping inexperienced young ladies with the use of deceitful tactics. This effect of the play, *Shabeelnaagood* and its title character is reminiscent of that of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956) after the production of which the phrase 'angry young man' became popular in England to describe writers who, like Osborne himself, were not happy at the time about the state of affairs in Britain (Rees, 1973:189).

Shabeelnaagood was created just seven years after Somali independence in 1960. This was a period characterised by national rejuvenation and literary and artistic flourishing in an atmosphere where freedom of expression was not suppressed as was the case in the following two decades under the dictatorial regime of Maxamed Siyad Barre. Thus, *Shabeelnaagood* was part of what I have described elsewhere[119] as '*beri-samaadkii masraxa Soomaalida*' (the golden era of Somali drama). On the other hand, *Shabeelnaagood* was one of the literary works of the time inspired by the growing popular dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in Somalia. There was a general feeling of disappointment when people felt that their aspirations after independence were evaporating into thin air. Such a dissatisfaction was expressed

119 Maxamed Daahir, 1987: 55.

by a popular movement led by opposition parties and other organisations who accused the government of corruption, injustice and incompetence (Abdisalam, 1996; Johnson, 1996; Kapteijns, 1999). As a result, a remarkable body of new literature critical of the *status quo* came out and *Shabeelnaagood* was part of this, as mentioned. One glaring example of this dissident literature is the following piece of poetry by Saxardiid Axmed:

> *Hashaan toban sano u heesaayey*
> *Hadhuubkiyo heeryadiiba cuntaye*
> *Lixdankaan haybin jirey maxaa helay?* (Quoted in Maxamed, 1994: 242).
>
> The she-camel[120] I've been singing about for ten years[121]
> Has eaten both the milking vessel and the saddle!
> What happened to the [year of] sixty I so much longed for?

Finally, there are several reasons for my choice of *Shabeelnaagood* as a representative play illustrating the transitional nature of post-independence Somali drama. The first is that this play offers plenty of aspects which clearly demonstrate the transitional nature of Somali post-independence plays. This will be detailed in the main body of the chapter. The second is the availability in various, reliable sources of the play's full text (see above) including an English translation. This is a unique case in the documentation of Somali plays. The third reason is the popularity of *Shabeelnaagood*, which is one of the criteria outlined by B. W. Andrzejewski as a basis for his choice to translate this play. Describing how he himself witnessed the extent of popularity of *Shabeelnaagood*, Andrzejewski writes,

> It drew such crowds in Mogadishu that police reinforcements had to be brought in to deal with the traffic jams and the hundreds of people who were besieging the box office. I met many people who knew whole passages from the play by heart, especially the exchanges between Diiddan and Diiddane (on pp. 62-5) and between Shabeel and the five school girls (on pp. 186-93). The pro-feminist tenor of the plot made it popular with women and with the educated elite,

120 Somali poets frequently use the image of a beloved she-camel to symbolise the country, the sovereignty, the dignified existence of the motherland. The reason for choosing a she-camel to embody the most valued ideals lies in the pastoral background of many poets. To the pastoralist, the she-camel is the most valued of all property.

121 Here, the poet refers to the ten years (1950-60) of struggle for Somali independence.

> while the more traditionally-minded men were impressed by its wit and wisdom. (Andrzejewski, 1974:vi).

My final reason is the aesthetic value of this play, which also was one of the criteria set out by Andrzejewski who assessed *Shabeelnaagood* as ‘a fine example of the genre [Somali drama]’ (ibid). This aspect will become apparent from my forthcoming analysis of the play.

To present a synopsis of the plot, we need to look at two distinct strands which are interwoven in *Shabeelnaagood* – one of them being the principal storyline and the other a supplementary one. The principal plot is not complex. It revolves around Shabeel (played by Cabdulle Raage) a heartless playboy, and his female victim, Shallaayo Guuleed (played by Maryan Mursal). Shabeel, the title character, is a young townsman, easy going as he is, who chooses to go against the established code of right and wrong in his society. He particularly fancies to lust after inexperienced young women; he ‘fans them with flattery and voluble words’ (Andrzejewski, 1974: 121) trapping them by means of false promises and bogus love, only to ruin their lives (socially, sexually and emotionally) after he has used them as “a queen for a night”.

After a prologue or opening glee presented by the whole cast, with the accompaniment of orchestral music, the first scene of the play opens at the family home of Shallaayo, the female protagonist. Guuleed Cawaale (played by Cabdullaahi Farey), Shallaayo's father, tells his wife, Shammado, that he was going on the following day on a pilgrimage and that she will be responsible for everything in their family while he is away. He particularly urges her to pay special attention to Shallaayo, their only daughter.

The central plot-line in the play takes off from the third scene where Shabeel casually meets Shallaayo, a secondary school girl with no previous experience of men. In the words of Shabeel, she is ‘a nice worthy little girl of astonishing beauty’ (p. 77). She is the only child of a middle class family in the Somali capital, Mogadishu. Shabeel pretends that he knows her and her family very well and that he

has been in love with her for a long time but had to conceal it from her and her family because ‘I am a very shy man’ he claims to justify his lies ‘I am shy even with the people among whom I was brought up, not to mention your father and your mother’ (p. 71).

At the beginning, Shallaayo strongly rejects him and his advances, her immediate response being ‘Go away!’ (p. 69). Even after he carries on heaping persuasive lies on her she resists ‘Why should I talk to you, brother? You don’t know me . . . You cannot buy me with your sorcery - Good-bye!’ (p. 71).

Actually he could eventually; he does buy her with his ‘sorcery’, with the magic of his eloquent courtship and tempting promises of a happy marriage, lavish wedding ceremony, luxury lifestyle and exciting holidays around the world. He eventually succeeds in persuading her into saying: ‘I have no objection to that’ (p. 71). What is more, he manages to convince her to keep their relationship a secret. ‘Don’t tell anyone about yourself or about myself or about us.’ When she suspiciously asks: ‘Shall I keep it secret from my family?’ he artfully replies, ‘The family! Don’t tell it even to the birds, until we have the big wedding!’ (p. 75). As a necessary gateway to his plans, Shabeel arranges for a bogus engagement ceremony; he does so in a secret collaboration with two accomplices, Shiikh and Saaxiib, who pose as Muslim clerics. Shabeel and his two accomplices, the two pseudo-clerics, are members of a group of young villains who collaborate in hunting and deceiving innocent young women.

Here, for the non-Somali reader to understand the reason why the playwright needed to create these two secondary characters and to include the bogus marriage scene in the structure of the plot, it is necessary to give a piece of background information about the socio-cultural milieu. In Somali society, especially that of the 1960s when *Shabeelnaagood* was produced, a relationship outside the confinements of marriage was considered unacceptable from both a religious (Islamic) and a social point of view. As a sign of ‘good practice’ in parenting, mothers and fathers were keen to prevent their daughters from getting involved in any intimate relationship with a man before marriage, which by and large was supposed to be an arranged marriage.

The majority of the girls themselves, especially those from respected families, often co-operated with their parents by suppressing their sexual desires in return for a good reputation which people considered as a key to a successful marriage and secure future.

It is true that exceptions occurred. Not every girl always abided by this norm. Many independent-minded girls who belonged to the new urban generation had begun to get into secret relationships and have boyfriends. One main reason was that they felt that this could be a necessary gateway to getting married on their own initiatives. However, even in this case, most girls were keen not to let their parents know about it and not to have sex before marriage, not even with a reliable boyfriend or recognised fiancé during the engagement period. This was because of their fear of two terrifying consequences: defloration (*bikrajab*) and illegitimate child (*wacal*).

A great importance was attached to virginity in a girl's life in Somali tradition. As the playwright expresses in the words of Shammado, Shallaayo's mother: 'Virginity is like gold' (p. 105); it was considered a symbol of honour and decency, as something that must be preserved for the long-awaited special occasion in the life of every 'good girl', the first night of the wedding union. A groom who finds his bride already deflowered was justifiably expected to divorce her immediately; and such a divorced young woman would not only bear all the blame but also all the disgrace for the rest of her life, thus becoming unqualified for remarriage.

The case of a *wacal / garac* or illegitimate child was even much worse. A girl made pregnant before marriage was a gross disgrace to her family, a 'shameful burden' (p. 91) to anyone who relates to her in any way. She would not only lose her chance for marriage, the dream of every marriageable girl in Somali society, but she would face an uncompromising ostracism by her family who would consider her as a stigma. The response of the community at large would not be less intolerant. She was certain to be labelled *wacalla-dhala*, (she-who-gives-birth-to-bastards), a deadly shameful nickname which many would use in place of her name. That is if she is lucky enough to escape the death penalty by her family who may do so in defence of the family honour, as they believe.

This so-called honour killing is something which some Muslim and Asian communities have in common. Examples are found even in Britain, in incidences where persons from the above communities murdered their daughters for having a boyfriend against their will or becoming pregnant with a man she is not married to. One such instance was the case of the "murder for shame" of Rukhsana Naz, the British young lady, from a family of Pakistani origin whose tragic made the headlines in 2007. She was killed by her own mother and brother who believed that Rokhsana, aged 19, 'had shamed the family by carrying an illegitimate child' (Verkaik, 2007:2). They killed her because they found her pregnant with her childhood sweetheart.

With this background information in mind, it is easier to grasp the dramatic elements in the way Xasan Shiikh Muumin treats the relationship between his two main characters, Shabeel and Shallaayo. Shabeel's sole aim is to get Shallaayo to have sex with him. However, he knows (as do the audience) that it was almost impossible for a girl of the age and background of Shallaayo at the time to be convinced to have sex with a man she was not married to, or at least, a man she was not in true love with.

In real life situations, average people in Somalia consider it as a sign of dishonesty for a boyfriend to ask his girlfriend for sex before they get married, more so at the time of *Shabeelnaagood*'s production. It was generally believed that a considerate boyfriend or fiancé with genuine long-term intentions about the relationship would be patient with his future wife, sparing her the risk of illegitimate pregnancy and/or untimely defloration. A typical response to such advances would be an outrage on the part of the girl who may conclude that the man is nothing more than a love cheat. This is therefore a delicate situation requiring careful attention and subtle handling on the part of the male partner.

Shabeel takes all these into account. On the other hand, he is far from prepared to get involved in a real marriage or in any kind of genuine commitment. That is why he has to arrange for a bogus engagement ceremony or '*nikaax dhinnix* [demi-

marriage]' (p. 73) just to put Shallaayo under the illusion that she is married to him; hence, the need for the roles of the two secondary characters, Shiikh and Saaxiib, the bogus Muslim clerics, as well as the importance of this scene as a whole which helps the intensification of the dramatic tension.

The story unwinds in very high tempo by the sixth scene at Shallaayo's family home. Guuleed Cawaale, Shallaayo's father, is not yet back from the pilgrimage. Worried about the deteriorating health condition of her daughter, Shammado, calls in a female nurse in her neighbourhood and asks her to examine the reasons for Shallaayo's poor health – her constant vomiting and loss of appetite for food. After the test the nurse, Kulmiya, tells Shammado that her daughter is pregnant. So shocked and ashamed, Shammado explodes with an uproar, bitterly crying and lamenting over her bad luck (p. 105ff):

> SHAMMADO: My God, may I be undone! . . . My God, where shall I go
> in this world?
> And have I got to face Haji Guuleed? Oh God!

Surprised by her mother's cry, naive Shallaayo, who is unaware of her pregnancy comes out of her room and asks her mother what the matter is:

> SHALLAAYO: What's the matter with you, mother?
> SHAMMADO [weeping]: Oh God, oh, oh!
> SHALLAAYO: Mother, what's the matter with you?
> SHAMMADO: Go away – oh God, leave me alone!
> SHALLAAYO: Stop talking like that, mother – why are you crying? (p. 105).

Eventually, Shammado delivers the bad news to her daughter while carrying on lamenting:

> SHAMMADO: The sand and the earth have slid to one side under my feet.
> Virginity is like gold – has not your livelihood been ruined?
> People will despise and insult me for this . . . where shall I trudge with my shame!
> SHALLAAYO: Come, come, mother, you are insulting me. Why

should God try me by making me bear a bastard child?
SHAMMADO: What is it then that fills your belly?
SHALLAAYO: Mother, my child is not bastard, it has a father. I shall show you who he is
Presently. For three months mother, I have been married to a man – it is just that he didn't come to see anyone, on account of his great shyness. Mother, why are you insulting me? He's very rich (p. 107).

With a big sigh of relief, Shammado asks her daughter some questions about the man; she particularly wonders why he kept hiding if he exists. She promises Shallaayo that if there is a man to whom her daughter is legally married she would do everything to support him; it is enough for her to slip the disgrace of becoming a grandmother of a *wacal* (bastard child).

Still unworried and confident under her big illusion, Shallaayo promises her mother; 'I shall bring him straight away!' (p. 107). She believes that he will be happy to know that he is about to become a father and that at this stage he will be prepared to meet his mother-in-law. That is why she approaches him with confidence and in a cheerful mood, whereas he meets her with a dismissive attitude right away, as though he had anticipated what she was up to:

SHALLAAYO: I have good news.
SHABEEL: That is good.
SHALLAAYO: A blessing came from the meeting we had together.
SHABEEL: What blessing? Tell me?
SHALLAAYO: You seem to be angry again!
SHABEEL: No, no –go on, go on. Jabber away!
SHALLAAYO: When God creates a person out of two human beings who lawfully belong to each other, is that not a blessing?
SHABEEL: There is a great blessing in a person created by God out of two human beings who lawfully belong to each other, but in our case it is not so good, since we've done it by fraud.
SHALLAAYO: What?
SHABEEL: We've done it by fraud! (p. 109).

Utterly shocked and horrified, Shallaayo pleads with Shabeel not to throw her into 'a deep pit', not to abandon her with 'the misery and the disaster you have brought on me! . . . For fear of God protect me (p.111).

She promises that her family will provide everything they need as a couple, ‘just come along with me to our family!’ (p. 115).

Unmoved by her tears and pleas, Shabeel indulges in his cruel response:

SHABEEL: Go! ... throw yourself into the mighty ocean.

> Lament and make yourself hoarse,
> . . . . . .
> Go wherever you like! Pour petrol on yourself,
> Set yourself alight with gunpowder,
> Take any direction you want
> But clear off! If that won’t shift you,
> I swear by God, I shan’t call the police to you –
> I’ll beat you up!

Too depressed and too terrified to go back home, where she would be ostracised anyway, Shallaayo wanders around and finally decides that the only thing she could do is to commit suicide, a common decision in real life among Somali young women in similar situations.

Diiddane, a righteous man in his late youth, catches sight of Shallaayo with the poison bottle. He stops her from killing herself, advising her to take a legal action against the man instead, on the grounds that he is the father of her unborn child and that his claim that they are not legally married is not true. Shallaayo takes the legal action, as advised, but she loses the case. Beyond this point, Shallaayo’s fate is left unclear.

As regards Shabeel, he carries on hunting young women, especially school girls, until his cunning methods are exposed by creating awareness among young women. At school, girls are warned by their female teachers against the tactics of the roaming *shabeelnaagood*s.

The inevitable fall of Shabeel as a women-hunter comes in scene 14, a highly amusing scene in which the playwright combines didactic instruction with a great sense of humour in an unusually harmonic union. Shabeel attempts to trap a group of young schoolgirls on their way home from school. To his bad luck, however, the girls are already warned against him. They recognise him by the words and methods

he uses which have already been described to them by their teacher. They expose him in humorous exchanges which they conclude with the following scornful group singing (p. 191):

> GIRLS: The leopard, the leopard, the women-hunting leopard, the robber who robs us,
> God save us from his harm!
> The lies that he whispered, the deceit poured on girls –
> Women have discovered the evil of it. Yes, a meeting was held to deal with the case
> And by God you've been exposed!

Such a humiliating exposure of Shabeel and his 'deceitful designs' (p.131) against young women represents, in the playwright's view, an appropriate social punishment for the wrong-doer. However, the playwright seems to feel that this is not enough– Shabeel should be punished physically as well, and in so doing the author of *Shabeelnaagood* conforms to the widespread tendency in play plotting that the villain must be punished ultimately. Many playwrights world-wide tend to seek a 'happy ending where problems are eventually solved, the battle-axe buried, evil punished and uprightness rewarded' (Grater, 1992: 109). The case of Somali dramatists is not an exception to this general inclination and Xasan Shiikh Muumin in *Shabeelnaagood* is a case in point.

The main plot of *Shabeelnaagood* ends with Shabeel and his accomplices, Shiikh and Saaxiib, being arrested by the police. There seems to be a missing link between what happens here and the incidents of scene 9 where Shabeel was found not guilty. The plot provides no linking incidents that led to the reverse of the court decision originally taken in favour of Shabeel. Likewise, we have no clue as to how the evil activities performed by Shiikh and Saaxiib have eventually been uncovered.

Alongside this principal plot, there is a subordinate storyline driven by two righteous characters, Diiddan (played by Hibo Maxamed) and Diiddane (played by Cabdi Muxumed Amiin). Diiddan is an unmarried lady in her thirties who works as a girls' school teacher. Diiddane, also unmarried, is a couple of years older than her. The play provides no clue to his profession.

As neighbours, Diiddan and Diiddane frequently meet, often casually. They tend to tease each other in their friendly talk about marriage-related topics, and this adds to the rich sense of humour that characterises *Shabeelnaagood*, as we shall see below. At times Diiddane would humorously raise the question why they themselves do not marry each other, but they never take this seriously until the very end, in the last lines of the last scene, when they end their hitherto adamant protest against marriage by taking a radical decision to marry each other, but not without conditions. Each of them requires the other to refrain from what they consider as dishonest patterns of behaviour performed by contemporary men and women, the behaviour responsible for the marriage breakdown and family disintegration, which originally made them decide separately not to get involved in modern marriage as practised at their time.

At the end of a quite humorous, yet significant scene (Scene 16), where Diiddane approaches Diiddan, this time seriously, with the idea of marrying each other, Diiddan sets instructive conditions for her approval:

> DIIDDAN: If you give up the things I told you about--
> DIIDDANE: Then--
> DIIDDAN: Then, it's all right.
> DIIDDANE: All that you said?
> DIIDDAN: Yes.
> DIIDDANE: And will you give up all those things I told you about?
> DIIDDAN: Yes, that's right.
> DIIDDANE: I shall give them up, and you will do the same, won't you?
> DIIDDAN: I'll give them up when you do.
> DIIDDANE: And won't you be the first to do it?
> DIIDDAN: It is you who have been the cause of it all. . . .
> DIIDDANE: All right. Fine. I agree. I hear and obey! I shall be the first to stop (p. 211).

Typical of the Somali full-length plays of the time, the performance of *Shabeelnaagood* was rounded off with an impressive epilogue summing up the central message of the play, as will be elucidated later in the chapter.

6.3 The message in focus

One central aspect of content in *Shabeelnaagood*, which emerges from even a casual

reading of the play, is the thesis-orientedness of its author, or the centrality of the message in the play, as will be delineated in the unfolding discussion. Despite the fact that *Shabeelnaagood* can be considered as a satirical comedy, it is obvious that the playwright's main preoccupation remains to deliver a message, as did his predecessors, Somali literary creators of earlier times (see below). To comprehend the factors that have influenced the playwright's emphasis on the instructive message in *Shabeelnaagood* it is helpful to first provide some background information about the playwright and the factors that influenced his intellectual formation.

6.3.1 Xasan's metamorphosis into a committed playwright

Three factors can be identified as being behind Xasan's message-focussed tendency or his strong sense of social commitment in *Shabeelnaagood*. The first is that Xasan was an immediate descendent of a literary tradition where the poet assumed the role of guidance provider or public educator. In pre-colonial through to early and middle colonial times, the classical poet often acted 'as the mouthpiece of the clan' (Nuruddin, 1989: 172), urging them to defend their honour, to help each other and to safeguard the common good of the community. At times poets instigated their clans to engage in feuds against rival clans to take revenge or to resume their threatened prestige.

Beyond the confines of clan politics, however, the poet often engaged in philosophical observations of life and acted as promoter of supreme virtues, whether religious or secular. He warned his fellow men and women against the consequences of their wrong doing. The following is an extract from a well known poem by a foremost 18th century poet and religious leader, Shiikh Cali Cabdiraxmaan (q.v.):

> *Aadane aqoonlaawe away aabayaashaa?*
> *Malaggii iyaga laayey, ma aduunsan ku arkayn*
> . . . . . .
> *Urur noolba lagu waani Arrafo iyo Soonqaad*
> *Adse weli ma aabayne ma oboo kalaad tahay!*[122]

122 This comes from a *masafo* poem known as '*Alif-yeen*'. For the text of a version of this *masafo* see Aw Jaamac, 2009: 61-66.

Oh, unknowledgeable mankind, where are your forefathers?
Do you think you will escape the fate that ended their lives?
. . . . . .
You are warned time and again, in *Arrafo*[123] and *Soonqaad*
Yet you keep disregarding it – are you like *obo*![124]

Such a didactic style in which the poet reproached the public is very common in the Somali poetic tradition. Acting as the most sensitive minds in society, Somali poets of all times have inclined to take liberty in fiercely criticising the negative conducts and behavioural attitudes of their fellow men and women. Quite conscious of the esteemed position he is placed in by his people, the Somali literary creator habitually assumes a greater moral responsibility than anyone else in the community. He acts as the nation's moral guide and as the shaper of its collective consciousness. He performs this function in such a way that suggests he is under constant moral pressure that the special position allocated to him entails an equally special social imperative. As his main concern he takes upon himself to take the lead in championing the common good and in doing so he 'speaks in the collective tongue of the group' (Wright, 1994: 15), i.e. the clan in the past or the *qaran* – the nation-state – in the modern context. His maxim is, as phrased by a post-independence playwright, Maxamuud Tukaale, '*Abwaanku waa macallinka bulshada'* (the *abwaan*[125] is the educator of the public) (Maxamuud, 1975). The late playwright made this statement in his introduction to the video-recorded performance in Djibouti of his highly popular play, *Hablayohow hadmaad guursan doontaan*? (O girls, when will you get married?) The play was first staged at the Mogadishu National Theatre in March 1975. In the body of the play too, the playwright more profoundly expresses this view of his in a powerful poetic language:

Weligiiba abwaanku
Ummadda waa u horseed
Halgan buu ku jiraa (ibid).

The *abwaan* is in a perpetual struggle
Leading the way [to a better life]

123 *Arrafo* and *Soonqaad* are the Somali names of the two months of Dhul Hijjah and Ramadan in the Muslim calendar respectively; they are a time of intensified religious preaching.
124 *Obo* is 'black hole'.
125 He is the poet/playwright.

For the nation.

In chapter 3 I discussed how this established practice has continued in the post-independence poetry; we have seen how the main concern of post-independence poets, such as Abshir Nuur Faarax "Bacadle" was to deliver a message. Post-independence playwrights, most of whom are poets as well, share the same tendency and Xasan Shiikh Muumin in *Shabeelnaagood* is an example.

The second factor that has influenced Xasan as a committed playwright is his background as a poet before he became a playwright. Indeed, he built on or made full use of his poetic skills in developing his playwrighting career. This is quite obvious from the author's heavy reliance on poetry in constructing *Shabeelnaagood* and other major plays, such as *Gaaraabidhaan* (Glow-worm). As a poet-playwright, Xasan kept on the established tradition of the Somali poet who assumed the role of voicing the common concern of his people, as explained earlier. This metamorphosis from poet to playwright is shared by the majority of the Somali transitional playwrights, who are often given the title of *abwaan*, a term which should be explicated as I will be using it frequently throughout the rest of this chapter for convenience.

The term is a neologism that has come into everyday speech over the past couple of decades as the result of an important metamorphosis in the function of a Somali poet. The *gabayaa* (poet) has gradually assumed additional tasks in his creative vocation. A significant poet of multiple talents is no longer just a poet in many cases. In fact, the use of the term *gabayaa* has become far less frequent in everyday speech in recent decades; it has increasingly been replaced by the term *abwaan*. This is because the contemporary poet in the post-independence era has endeavoured to undertake the new tasks of playwrighting and composing modern lyrics in addition to continuing to create the conventional verse of *maanso-goleed*, or public forum poetry. As a result, his title has been upgraded, so to speak; he is crowned with the more prestigious title of *abwaan*, meaning multi-talented literary creator, poet-

playwright in most part.[126]

With its majestic touch and complex shades of meanings, *abwaan* is one of those Somali literary terms that defy translation into English. The nearest English equivalent to the meaning of *abwaan* in the established Somali is probably 'sage'. In former times the term was used to describe a wise man with a wealth of knowledge and experience in life. In view of this, traditional Somalis always turned to the *abwaan* for advice and trusted his guiding judgements.

In *Qaamuuska Af-Soomaaliga* (Somali Dictionary) by Yaasiin Kenadiid, the entry is given the following definitions:

> *Qof laamo badan oo cilmi aqoon weyn ku leh ama u leh siiba dhaqanka iyo ilbaxa; waaya-arag; wax-yaqaan; buuni. 2. Buug ama buugag laamaha aqoontoo dhammi ku ursursan yihiin.*
> (Yaasiin, 1976: 5)
>
> A person with remarkable expertise in many branches of knowledge, especially in culture and ancestral civilisation; experienced; knowledgeable; expert or sage. 2. Book or books containing all branches of knowledge [encyclopaedia].

Thus, giving the title *abwaan* to the contemporary poet means that he became even more esteemed. In return for his undertaking such complex creative tasks, he has acquired the double esteem customarily attached to the poet and the customary *abwaan* separately.

It is true that some poets are still there who are not seen writing plays or composing songs. There are others too who only concentrate on writing for the theatre. However, most of the significant poets in contemporary Somalia try their best to become playwrights as well; indeed, those who find themselves capable, would seek to make playwrighting the centre of their creative activities. This emanates from the

126 In more recent years, however, the use of the title *abwaan* has been extended by the average Somalis to refer to any literati. Moreover, an increasing number of ordinary people have tended to use the term, indiscriminately to refer to anyone who has produced some poetry or worked out a play. If continued, such a loose use by some may lead to the decline of the value of the honorific title.

general belief among the Somali artistic community that '*maansadu riwaayadda waa u lagama maarmaan*', [poetry is essential to the play] (Cabdi Muxumed, 2002) and that it is therefore the poet alone who is entitled to create a quality play. Dramatists believe that the crucial ideas in the play should be expressed in verse, whether sung or exchanged between characters in the dialogue (for details see Andrzejewski, 1985 and Maxamed, 1987). In Somali theatrical tradition every drama group is normally led by an *abwaan*, who serves as the god-father of the company. As a senior colleague and leader, the *abwaan* is highly respected by the rest of the troupe.

This increase in the range of the poet's responsibilities in modern times may be seen as corresponding with a similar increase in the complexity of the contemporary social issues dealt with in the new literature. Unlike the classical poet in a traditional clan setting, the post-independence *abwaan* deals with the problems of a sophisticated urban society in a modern nation state which is part and parcel of a fast changing global context (Cali, 1997; Xasan, 1997). To represent the experience of such a new, complex world and to meet its emerging entertainment needs, the emergence of new forms of literature has become necessary; forms more complex than the traditional ones. Among the leading modern art forms, drama has appeared the most successful in dealing with a complex social reality, in 'mirroring' life in its entirety. Biodun Jeyifo asserts that,

> more than the other literary arts, drama deals at a highly concentrated, more intense level with the contradictions of social existence. Equally important is the fact that drama does not merely subsume *conflict* as its organising structural motif; beyond this, drama also axiomatically attempts a resolution of sorts, a provisional synthesis in the conflicting pulls within its constitutive action, thereby approaching the limit of the *dialectical image* potentially realisable in art" Biodun Jeyifo *The Truthful Lie*, p. 7). (Jeyifo, 1985: 7)

This may justify the Somali poet's choice of the theatre where the established craft of versification is moulded into becoming part of a combined work of art, a dramatic performance with new features tuned to the needs of the contemporary audience– both entertainment and educational. In a tape recorded interview conducted during

my fieldwork, the celebrated *abwaan*, Cali Sugulle stated that, '*Haddaad xadhiggay doonayaan u garaacdo uun bay dadku ku raacayaan*' [You can only gain the interest of the public if you make your work tuned to their tastes and needs] (Cali, 1997).

The work of Xasan Shiikh Muumin should be understood against this background. Xasan is a typical Somali *abwaan* with a compelling sense to act as a public educator.

Another factor is the political and social environment in Somalia at the time when Xasan opened his eyes to this world both as a young man and as a poet. This was the two decades that preceded the Somali political independence in 1960, a period characterised by an overwhelming political drive for independence and for an improved quality of life in the wake of fast urbanisation. Poets and other artists were at the forefront of the energetic popular movement, of those Somali men and women who had associated themselves with the popular movement for a better Somalia. I have detailed elsewhere[127] how such a drive had influenced or inspired the emergence of an entire body of new art and literature. This has also been discussed in other scholarly works (see, for example, Johnson, 1996b).

Although Xasan does not belong to the first generation of patriotic artists, he was greatly influenced by them, as we shall see shortly. As a playwright he belonged to the second generation, the post-independence generation of committed artists. However, Xasan did participate in the dynamics of the movement for Somalia independence as a member of the Somali Youth League (SYL), the leading nationalist party of the time (Xasan, 1997). He was influenced by previous literary figures who took upon themselves to educate the public. He tends to consciously follow the example of those role models to whom he refers in *Shabeelnaagood* as '*halyeyadii'* (the heroes):

> *Halyeyadii habeeyay ee, higaaddooda kala qaybshey*
> *Dhaxalkoodii baan haysanaa, hilinkii toosnaaye* (pp. 212-3).
> The heroes who gave guidance and dispensed their well-ordered words

127 Maxamed, 1994.

We keep all their inheritance – that straight path.

Of Xasan's 'heroes', who have had an impact on his formation as an artistic creator, some were his contemporaries although they belonged to an older generation of poets, such as the poet-playwright Maxamed Ismaaciill "Barkhad-cas" (died in 1967) and the poet Cabdillaahi Suldaan Timacadde died in1973), both of whom were devoted patriots and social reformists. Relating his disappointment with the coming of a shaky independence in 1960, Xasan identifies himself with these two great poets, saying: 'Right from the first day of independence, Timacadde, Barkhad-cas and myself had taken opposition stands. We felt that what was happening was quite different from what we had strived for.' (Xasan, 1997). In the play too, he expresses this same view by saying, in the words of Diiddane:

Halkaan haabanayno iyo, asluubteenii waxa haysta
Waa laba hab oo kala fog, aan haab isku lahayne (p. 214).

The goal to which we stretch our hands and our true behaviour
Are two things far apart which have no common bond.

Such a disappointment felt by the general public, who felt that the post-independent Somali government had failed them, was constantly mirrored in all forms of post-independence Somali literature, see above.

6.3.2 Thematic emphasis and the playwright's message-orientedness in the play

Having highlighted the factors that have contributed to the formation of Xasan Shiikh Muumin as a committed playwright with a message to deliver, let us now proceed to the discussion of how this tendency is reflected in this play. A close look into the content of the play as a whole suggests that the author was motivated by a compelling sense of obligation to forewarn his fellow men and women against the consequences of their vices. The playwright seems to be motivated by a bitter feeling that he is caught in a wicked world, a 'world [that] has reached a helpless state' (p. 119). Xasan seems to have created *Shabeelnaagood* with an alarming sense that the entire fabric of his society was being dismantled, that the country was heading for what he terms '*guuldarro*' (disaster) (p. 45), due to the people's failure to 'winnow right from wrong' (p. 213). In response, he feels that he, as an *abwaan*,

has a duty to act immediately, to forewarn his fellow citizens of the consequences of their indulgence in wrong-doing, both as individuals and collectively. *Shabeelnaagood*, as Andrzejewski puts it, 'censures the evils which afflicted Somali society at that time' (Andrzejewski, 1974: viii**).** The play suggests that it was created by someone with the main preoccupation to diagnose 'the rot that was eating away at society and to mobilize the hearts of all Somali individuals against it' (Maryan and Kapteijns, 2002:129).

The playwright employed Shabeel, the title character, to dramatise how contemporary men in Somali urban centres have turned away from all traditional values and indulged in destructive behaviour in their selfish pursuit of bodily pleasures. On the other hand, Xasan has created Shallaayo, the female protagonist, as a symbolic analogue of the young nation-state, Somalia, in the aftermath of an independence that came with the symptoms of the diseases that, in the playwright's view, were set to kill it 'unless one goes out to face them one will perish through them' (p. 215).

It is relevant to note here that the depiction of a beautiful girl to symbolise the nation is a very familiar feature in Somali literature. Clear examples are the two heroines, *Inan Sabool* (meaning daughter of the impoverished) and *Xorriyo* (Independence), the female protagonists of two popular plays named after them respectively. In the first play, *Inan-Sabool*, (touched upon in chapter 1) composed in 1959 by the late poet/playwright Maxamed Ismaaciil "Barkhad-cas", the heroine suffers a lot at the hands of male characters symbolising clannism, ignorance, greed and so forth. Finally, a righteous male character, Cilmi, meaning knowledge or education, comes to the rescue of *Inan-Sabool* and eventually marries her (Xudeydi, 2011). The message was clear: it is only through education that the fragile nation-state can be salvaged from clannism and ignorance and be built in the right way. In *Xorriyo*, by Maxamuud Cabdullaahi "Sangub" (1980) the title heroine is kidnapped by a gang of four brothers and their mother and forced to marry the four men simultaneously. Here again *Xorriyo* is Somalia or Somali independence being

hijacked by evil leaders; and the forced polyandrous marriage mirrors the extent to which such "leaders" go against all moral and religious virtues. For a detailed critical analysis of the play see Maxamed, Daahir 1987.

Similarly, in *Shabeelnaagood* the 'nice worthy little girl of astonishing beauty' (p. 77) who suffers a lot as the result of her inexperienced, unguided pursuit of a premature independence from her family, through a marriage that was set to turn out bogus, could be seen as symbolising the young, unguided nation-state threatened by a multitude of malpractices resulting chiefly from the new generation's misconception of modernity (Shabeel's unfamiliar behaviour as a modern libertine), as well as from the young nation's failure to produce and elect the right leaders capable of the healthy management of the delicate, new-born, independent state (the man 'elected and placed in his high office and yet does nothing to fulfil his trust' [p. 63]).[128]

The devastating vices embodied by Shabeel are highlighted throughout the play, from the first scene in which he appears (Scene 3), where he plots his 'deceitful designs' (p.131), pouring lies on his victim, Shallaayo, to trap her into that fatal, bogus marriage, to the end of the principal plot (eleven scenes later) where Shabeel is not only exposed but humiliated by school girls who scorn him singing:

> The leopard, the leopard, the women-hunting leopard, the robber who robs us,
> God save us from his harm!
> The lies that he whispered, the deceit poured on girls-
> Women have discovered the evil of it. Yes, a meeting was held to deal with the case
> And by God you've been exposed!
> The leopard, the leopard, the women-hunting leopard, the robber who robs us, God saves us from his harm! (P. 190-91).

On the other hand, Shallaayo too is not left blameless. In fact, the playwright clearly

128 In my interview with him, the playwright confirmed to me that, as a patriot who had contributed to the struggle for Somali independence, he was disappointed by the success in the general elections of men (he gives names) renowned for their incompetence or malpractices or both. He contends that in place of the honest and the competent, these self-centred politicians who were set to dominate the state institutions came to the fore through corruption and clan sentiments.

and sometimes fiercely criticises his heroine and the generation she represents, the young townswomen of the time. This is illustrated in the judge's response to Shallaayo's protest against the court's decision in favour of Shabeel the culprit:

> If you women guarded your own dignity yourselves, the leopard would not destroy you.
> Be quiet and weep softly – It is the devil's prompting that has slain you!
> Whom can you blame? Blame yourself! (P. 135).

Again, metaphorically, this could be interpreted as epitomising the agony of the young African nation-state, who suffers as the result of its failure to govern itself properly, to produce or choose the right leaders, instead of opting for those who were set to put its destiny in jeopardy.

Thus, the playwright seems to have acted under the pressing social imperative that he must speak out, as he confirmed to me in an interview (Xasan, 1997). He told me that he felt duty-bound to come forward and warn his fellow citizens against the precipice their country was heading for, a prophecy that came true two decades later when the entire country was ravaged by mindless civil war.

Turning to the aspect of characterisation and the transitional elements discerned in it, the playwright seems to have succeeded in creating interesting characters well-suited to serve his message-focussed purposes. The main character, Shabeel, is a complex character with conflicting traits, mostly negative, albeit the presence of some positive ones as well, as we shall see shortly. The playwright employs this character to critically depict the prevailing social ills in his country. He created Shabeel to represent the destructive behaviour which characterised certain sections of the Somali urban society or what Johnson (1996) calls ‘the new elite’ (p. 2). Acting out his darkest fantasies, Shabeel deliberately ruins the life of a rising school girl, Shallaayo, who represents the new generation of young women in Somali towns.

> SHABEEL: Until I bring the number [of ruined women] up to ninety,
> And then get it level with a hundred, and chastise them in this way,
> I shall not give up – this is my resolve! (p. 117**).**

Thus, the playwright uses this chief character as a symbol of cruelty in modern society. Shabeel is the product of a drastically changing society which, in the playwright's view, has fallen away from its traditional values and way of life, without establishing new and better alternatives. Shabeel chooses to disregard and undo all the established virtues of his society. He prefers to be a dishonest lover (condemned by the Somali tradition and current accepted social norms) to being a legitimate husband and father. He breaches religious morality (his false oath at the Islamic court as well as his indulgence in sex outside marriage). And in so doing he ridicules the entire establishment including the state and its judicial system.

Judging such an initial portrayal of Shabeel makes us conceive him as a villain. However, to be closer to the complex texture of human nature, Shabeel must be seen from a number of different perspectives: he may be considered as a pathetic victim of fate, as a helpless human being drawn into a fragmented social existence with a legion of barriers preventing him from finding happiness or even a meaning to his life.

Although this dimension of Shabeel's character is not fully developed in the actual events of the play, reading the sub-text leads to the conclusion that his cruelty is a natural response to or at least an inevitable part of a wicked world, one which has been cruel to him as well. That is the way the playwright depicts the other side of this character. In his monologues the playwright makes him regard his deeds as justifiable because others are doing the same and even worse; his words indicate that he is part and parcel of a society in which wrong-doing has become the order of the day. In one of the monologues he argues that women, his target victims, are not less dishonest, cruel or deceitful, 'they themselves are not blameless and they keep deceiving us' (p. 115).

The conflict in Somali plays is often between a clear right and clear wrong. Characters are usually depicted as either ugly villains or flawless heroes. Samadiid (He-who-rejects-good), for instance, the chief character in Cabdi Miigane's play, *Qaran iyo Qabiil*, (State and Clan) (Cabdi, 1985), a graduate and director of a state enterprise, is a gross embodiment of all vices: he is corrupt in his management, dishonest and cruel in his relationship with his female partner who gave him all her love, and narrow-minded

in his way of thinking. Conversely, his former classmate and friend, Siciid, is depicted as "Mr Right", flawless in every aspect: his behaviour, his work performance, his family relations and so forth.

This kind of single-dimensional characterisation is often rejected by literary critics describing it as not true to life, if drama is treated as a realistic representation of life. Grey areas always exist in the nature of every human being. Hence, Shakespeare's genius in attaching a particular deadly flaw to each of the otherwise great heroes in his well known tragedies (e.g., Othello's jealousy and Macbeth's greed).

Xasan Shiikh Muumin seems to be far-sightedly aware of this need to represent the grey areas, the complexity of human character. In fairness to Shabeel, the playwright has done two important things. First, he makes others share the blame with him. He has given women and the society at large their fair share of the blame. He depicts Shabeel as just one sail in a windmill, a part of a wicked world, a 'world [that] has reached a helpless state' (p. 119), a society that has turned men into beasts ('leopards') and women into material-minded liars and dishonest partners (pp. 93, 115) who have misconceived modernity ('we have gained our freedom') and 'transgressed the bounds', that which 'is lawful' (p. 115).

Second, in further fairness to Shabeel, the author provides us with a glimpse of his better side. Shabeel struggles with conflicting desires inside him, thus truthfully representing (on another level) the contradictory nature of the broader social context, the context of Somali transitional society. In one moment he boasts his deliberate cruelty against women; in the next his conscience awakens and he expresses how regretful and how religiously concerned he grows 'the path to the other World and the questioning beyond the grave await me' (p. 115).

The playwright presents such a delicate balance, as well as contradicting existence (both on individual and societal levels) in the following passage recited by Shabeel, in the form of a poetic monologue, immediately after he locked out ruined Shallaayo:

> Of all the women I deceived with bogus benedictions,
> With spurious nuptials and forced attentions,
> This one who is now walking away is the eightieth.
> Yet the path to the Other World and the Questioning beyond the grave
> Await me – oh men, what shall I do?
> Shall I continue or shall I stop?
> Still, they themselves are not blameless and they keep deceiving us:
> "I was away on a visit to a friend, she lives in Marka"[129]
> Or "I went to this or that market", "I am going to the cinema" –
> It is with such pretexts and lies that they appease us.
> They keep collecting kerosene in mugs. I don't know where they are taking it!
> They themselves are not blameless, and if you question them a little,
> "We don't live in times like those – have me as I am,
> And if that doesn't work, your nine children
> Will be left to your care tomorrow morning and I shall move into town"
> Is their answer (p. 115-117).

Going through this passage, one can discern that the author has aimed to serve two purposes. The first is to articulate his critique of the negative behaviour of contemporary wives and, hence, their share of the responsibility for family disintegration, and the second is to depict the inner conflict within Shabeel's character– the better side of his nature tells him to 'stop' while the darker one persuades him to 'continue'. The latter prevails eventually–he decides to 'continue', albeit not without telling his reasons for cheating and eventually destroying women, one after the other. He vows:

> Until I bring the number [of women victims] up to ninety,
> And then get it level with a hundred, and chastise them in this way,
> I shall not give up – this is my resolve! (p. 117).

Here it is important to observe that within Shabeel's divided self, the playwright depicted this character in such a way that makes his inner conflict between right and wrong appear to be reflecting the conflict between the influence of tradition and that of modern life, with the latter being behind the wrong side. One moment his mind rushes into wrong-doing seemingly influenced by the newly emerged habits of Somali, half-urbanised men who tended to heartlessly instrumentalise inexperienced girls in their selfish pursuit of bodily pleasures, a recent tendency which the new generation of men consider as being fashionable. The next moment however, the influence of traditional,

129 A town in southern Somalia.

religious, moral code of right and wrong is activated and consequently, Shabeel's moral conscience awakens and he would start suffering from self-dividedness, 'what shall I do, shall I continue or shall I stop!' (p. 115). This indicates the status of Shabeel as a transitional character torn between the conflicting influences of the past and present; and in this characteristic Shabeel represents members of the above-mentioned, self-divided male population in the Somalia of the post-independence period.

Diiddane and Diiddan are another two important characters in the play, the two lead characters in the sub-plot. They play an important role in the play, even though they only occasionally appear in the principal plot. The playwright uses them as a choral voice through which he expresses his instructive message in the play in a summarised, more focused fashion. However, in serving this purpose, Diiddan and Diiddane are not passive commentators who merely provide choral voices, as did the classical chorus in ancient Greek drama; rather, they get involved in structural relationships and dynamic interaction not only between the two of them but also with other characters in the principal plot (e.g. Diiddane's encounters with Shallaayo in Scenes 8 and 13, giving her some guidance in the first and engaging in a gender-based debate with her in the second; and Diiddan's defiance of the sexual advances of Shabeel in Scene 12 as well as her educating the female pupils against him in Scene 14). The lengthy, sometimes repetitive conversations between Diiddan and Diiddane–mainly in poetic form–are dominated by heated arguments on the deteriorating state of affairs in their society. They frequently engage in heated arguments on gender and marriage, arguments which at times take the form of a microcosm of the endless battle of the sexes in Somali society, an element frequently featured in Somali transitional drama. Diiddane and Diiddan share several similarities: their being imbibed with their rural tradition (evident from their extensive use of the established verbal art of pastoral origin, and from their stand against the decline of traditional family values); their patriotic views (through which the playwright extols his reformist ideals in a fashion more direct than the main plot); and their protest against marriage as it stands.

Here again, discerning the playwright's depiction of Diiddane and Diiddan one can

find transitional qualities. This is apparent from, for instance, Diiddane's continued links with the pastoral environment where he originally came from, as the Somali audience understands from the context of the play with the help of the background they share with the playwright. Physically he lives in the capital city and practices the day-to-day activities of a townsman yet mentally he is still tethered to the countryside and to the traditional way of thinking. This is something he shares with Diiddan, who like him, lives and works in the city but who yearns for the life in the countryside, 'I can't stay away from the country for too long' (p. 57). They both long for the pastoral environment and believe in the importance camel's milk to clean one's 'stomach of all impurities' (ibid). Moreover, they keep with old beliefs such as 'envious eyes' (p. 57). In reflecting such a mixture of influences of the traditional way of life and thinking and of the modern city life, these two characters truthfully represent the half-urbanised townspeople in Somali transitional society. One negative influence of the past in such a divided mentality of this kind of people was that people in a position of responsibility would tend to practise nepotism and clan-based injustice in managing public affairs of a modern state. This is one of the vices criticised in the play.

Coming back to the themes and their transitional nature, the play treats a number of themes which reflect a number of social problems that emerged in the new Somali society after independence, a society in transition undergoing a process of speedy urbanisation and modernisation, as discussed in chapter 1. As central themes, the playwright treats the related issues of the collapse of modern marriage, family disintegration, collapse of traditional values, and, as a consequence, the victimisation of innocent young women by ruthless playboys. In addition, the play criticises the political regime of the time for incompetence, corruption and injustice, as we shall see later in the analysis. The playwright was critical of what Ali describes, in a commentary on one of the songs in this play, as 'the inability of the elected politicians to address developmental issues such as water, electricity and health care' (Ali, 1999:125).

In all of these themes the transitional characteristics of the play may be discerned.

On the one hand these issues are the product of a period of transition in Somali history (see chapter 1); and on the other, the social and political problems dealt with in these themes appear to be momentary in nature, in the sense that they did not exist in Somali traditional society and, in the playwright's view, they may be discontinued or changed in the future when people become more conscious of the bad consequences of their wrong-doings; the playwright expects that, with a raised awareness, people may realise with him that 'unless one goes out to face them [the depicted problems] one will perish through them' (p. 215). That is why he calls for action to stop the said vices, 'Those who bear the guilt for the evil we described should now desist from it–that is what we must struggle for!' (p. 145). This means that he believes that this kind of struggle will lead to a raised awareness which will make people 'desist from' wrong-doing.

To dramatise the above themes with the message in focus and in such a way that amuses the audience at the same time, the playwright employed four useful techniques. Firstly, he made full use of his poetic talent to serve the stated purpose; secondly, he skilfully employed well-constructed prologue and epilogue. Thirdly, he devised a supplementary plot to provide a more focused choral commentary on the main problems dealt with in the play. Finally, he cleverly utilised humour to deliver many of his instructive messages in an amusing fashion far from boring the audience. Let us consider these four artistic techniques in detail, one at a time, examining how they complement each other in serving the said purpose, namely to make sure that the central message of the play is effectively delivered, that the crucial issues raised in the principal plot are clearly highlighted.

6.3.2.1 Poetic inserts as dramatic action

Commenting on the use of poetry in drama, T. S. Elliot writes,

> When it comes to the present age, we are not going to be deterred by a fatalistic philosophy of history from wanting a poetic drama, and from believing that there must be some way of getting it. Besides, the craving for poetic drama is permanent in human nature (quoted as an epigram in Hinchliffe, 1977).

Somali playwrights seem to be aligned with Eliot in their 'craving for poetic drama', in their belief that poetry is essential play construction. They tend to construct the significant parts of their plays in poetic form, as mentioned earlier on. As the late Professor Andrzejewski states,

> In Somali plays the important parts are usually in poetic form. The use of prose is mainly restricted to humorous scenes or brief snatches of conversation. Initially some plays were entirely in prose or contained just a few poetic inserts, but authors soon discovered that to succeed in their art they had to satisfy the insatiable craving for poetry among the public. This is not surprising if one considers that poetry composed in alliterative verse is a dominant feature of Somali culture in general (Andrzejewski, 1978: 88).

Shabeelnaagood attests to the truth in these statements. To get his message across in the most effective way, Xasan Shiikh Muumin makes a full use of his competence as a poet–he strives to make sure that all significant ideas in the play are conveyed in verse, as will be illustrated shortly.

From reading the printed pages of *Shabeelnaagood*, one can easily observe that the core content in each of the 16 scenes is in poetic form. Almost every one of these main, poetic parts is preceded by an initial part in prose mainly meant to set the tune for the main body of the dialogue that is exchanged in verse. Improvised and comic in nature, the prose parts are in most part smaller in size and less substantial in content. True to life, to real conversations in Somali oral communication, the prose parts tend to be fluid, slow-paced, sometimes repetitive to the extent of sounding monotonous to people unfamiliar with Somali drama and with the life situations it attempts to imitate. Such a response or impression is even more likely in the case of someone reading just the playtext in translation.

When it is time for the dialogue to move on to a point of remarkable importance, the language too shifts into poetic form and the dramatic tension intensifies. Regulated by the strict rules of the traditional alliteration (*xarafraac*) and metre (*miisaan*), the poetic parts are highly stylised, economical, well-thought out and well-focused. Every word in the extremely rich poetic language is counted for and carefully chosen to serve a definite purpose and the actors are not allowed to alter anything, not even a word, in

the poetic parts while they are free for wording the parts in prose which are improvised. This is best described in the words of Andrzejewski:

> In performance, the actors are expected to reproduce as faithfully as they can the poetic parts of the play word for word. As for the parts in prose, they are allowed to alter their dialogue as they like, as long as this does not distort the trend of the play. There are in fact very substantial variations in the wording of the prose dialogue from performance to performance (Andrzejewski, 1974: 3-4).

The following extract from the beginning of Scene Two illustrates this contrast between the fluid initial parts in prose and the carefully-built ones in poetry in the dialogue of a typical scene in the play. We shall also see how the first form leads to the second. This is the first scene of the supplementary plot led by Diiddan and Diiddane (see synopsis above). The content is self-evident:[130]

> DIIDDAN [*unexpectedly encountering Diiddane*]: What a surprise!
> DIIDDANE: What a surprise!
> DIIDDAN: How are you, cousin?[131].
> DIIDDANE: I'm well, and how are you, cousin?
> DIIDDAN [*affectionately*]: Cousin . . .
> DIIDDANE [*kisses her on the cheek*]: Glory be to God!
> DIIDAN: Don't kiss me; I'm not your aunt![132] Well, you have gained weight and become handsome, haven't you?
> DIIDDANE: Well--
> DIIDDAN: Listen!
> DIIDDAN: Yes?
> DIIDDAN: By God, cousin, don't walk in the street! You may get hurt by the glances of those who envy you![133]
> DIIDDANE: Do you know something?
> DIIDDAN: What?

130 I have skipped the original Somali version for its length; in the case of shorter texts however Somali versions are given, especially if they are in poetic form

131 Diiddan and Diiddane's use of the word 'cousin' and similar kinship terms does not mean that they are related to each other as such. Somalis are in the habit of using kinship terms such as 'cousin', 'brother', 'sister', uncle', 'aunt', 'niece', 'nephew' and so forth in addressing people who are not necessarily their relatives; in this case, they use these terms either for endearment or respect.

132 By custom, Somali women shy away from being kissed by a man in public (even out of respect or endearment) unless he is a relative.

133 The reference here is made to the evil eye which, according to Somali customary belief, 'can harm someone even without the will or knowledge of the person who casts the spell; he does not need to have special powers, for a feeling of envy or a sense of grievance will generate enough malice to have an effect. The more a man [or woman] gives cause for envy or dislike the more he [or she] is exposed to danger [of becoming a victim of an evil eye]' (Andrzejewski, 1974: 27).

DIIDDAN: I've been in the town for a whole week now, and . . .
DIIDDAN: And what?
DIIDDANE: And because people have kept on saying 'oh, how he has filled out!'[134], the glances of envious eyes have whittled me down already. Do you see what I mean?
DIIDDAN: You won't be hurt by the eyes of the envious, but it's. . .
DIIDDANE: The reason why I've become fat is that I went into the
country.[135] I cleaned my stomach of all impurities by drinking camel's milk. Anyway, can you see how handsome I am now?
DIIDDAN: I shall go into the country too at the first opportunity. I shall go during my holiday.
DIIDDANE: Holiday?
DIIDDAN: Yes, I can't stay away from the country for too long (pp. 57 – 9).

It is after such a long conversation of introductory nature about side subjects in an improvised prose that the playwright makes Diiddane and Diiddan turn to the main subject of the conversation in the scene, namely the subject of marriage. And to signal that they are now moving to something more serious or more substantial, they lapse into verse:

DIIDDANE: May you find good health there! Be sure to go during your holiday. I say [*lapses into verse*],
Diiddan, the two of us
Haven't seen each for years,
And, all that time apart
We've heard no news of each other.
Did you ever get married?

DIIDDAN [*following the poetic pattern started by Diiddane*]:
My brave friend, that talk of yours,
Is for the most part mistaken.
In any discussion
The wisdom which is acknowledged by all
And is marked by brevity is much better.

134 Contrary to the current Western style of favouring slimness as a sign of fitness or beauty, in Somalia and elsewhere in Africa, especially at the time of production of *Shabeelnaagood*, gaining weight was considered as a sign of being wealthy and healthy; it was even believed that it makes people look nicer.

135 Owing to the very close links of the half-urbanised townspeople in the burgeoning urban centres with their pastoral roots, they tended to go back for frequent visits to their rural areas of origin as favourite resorts during holidays and similar occasions. They believed, and still believe, that the fresh air and the unprocessed food of lievestock products would enhance thei health and their general feeling of well-being.

As for myself, to the question of marriage,
I have given no attention
I shall not regret it
And I shall grow old in this resolve!

DIIDDANE: Why, sister?
DIIDDAN: From marriage, which people
used to cherish,
All dignity is gone
And burning bitterness comes after it.
Unless it is rescued.
A hollow land abandoned by man
And drained of all water
It will become at the end.
I have tied the hands of marriage behind its back.
And you, didn't you get married? (ibid).

Obviously, the central issue which the scene is designed to highlight is the collapse of marriage in modern times and how people became reluctant about it. However, the dialogue goes on for one and a half pages of the book before saying one single word relating to the actual topic it was meant to cover. Instead, the two characters have a slow-paced, over-elaborate chat about Diiddane's return from the countryside and the benefits of visits to the rural interior. However, from a structural point of view, such a preliminary chat is important for setting the tone for the more focussed discussion to come. It creates a life-like situation whereby this kind of discussion comes naturally between two neighbours who have not seen each other for a long time. It is natural that they ask about each other's news; this led to the question about their marriage status which in turn led to the intended discussion about the broader problem of marriage breakdown and family disintegration in their society. In addition, one can assume that it may be the case that the playwright intentionally wanted to touch upon certain positive aspects of the countryside. There is another possibility that it was the conscious intention of the playwright to hint at Diiddane's rural background, although this is not linked to the plot or the theme of the play.

What is significant here is that in this kind of gradually unfolding dialogue line, poetry takes over at the stage where a significant point is about to be made (e.g. when Diiddane began to raise the issue of marriage by asking Diiddan whether she 'ever got married' (p. 59), and it carries on until the playwright's message is satisfactorily

brought home in the words of the characters. The core of the message however is yet to come; it is developed and fully articulated in Diiddane's answer to the question asked by Diiddan at the end of her last passage:

> DIIDDANE: Diiddan, I haven't married yet,
> And for the same reasons as you spoke of,
> I too have kept my hands away from it.
> The love which marriage had,
> And its significance have now been slaughtered.
> Entering upon it together
> Is nowadays like an exchange of riddles
> And silly tittle-tattle.
> A girl from the neighbourhood running along the street
> And a leopard, expert in stalking
> Greet each other in the evening.
> 'He is a nice boy'
> 'And she is a fragrant girl'.
> 'Let us decide now!'
> The wedding is in the evening
> And on the next day there is the split.
> Instantly the bed is folded up
> And they part in haste! (p. 60-61).

Note how this passage links the subordinate plot to the main one by directly commenting on the latter's central theme: Shabeel's victimisation ('a leopard, expert in stalking') of Shallaayo ('a girl from the neighbourhood') by means of a bogus marriage which she accepted 'in haste'.

The dramatic tension gets more intensified with the poetic dialogue growing even more seriously toward the end of page 60. Here, the playwright makes his instructive message even more direct by asserting this poetic pronouncement, in the words of Diiddan:

> DIIDDAN: *Guuldarro weeye sidaasiye*
> *Haddii guurka la daayo*
> *Lays gargaarsana waayo*
> *Geyigaa goblamaaya.*
>
> DIIDDAN: It's a disaster!
> And if people give up marriage
> And do not help each other
> The country will be bereft of children

(pp. 60-61).

The didactic nature of this statement is unmistakable and articulating it in poetic form makes it more powerful and better attuned to the receptiveness of the Somali recipients who are renowned for their love of poetry, in the words of Richard Burton, 'a nation of poets' (Burton, 1894: 82). Thus, it is obvious that the use of poetic form has helped the playwright to achieve his goal, i.e., to articulate his protest against the collapse of the value of marriage in a concise yet convincing and penetrating manner.

Generally speaking, Somali dramatists use poetic insertions for several purposes: to make sure that the important ideas in the play are thoughtfully formulated; to ensure the core content of the play is formulated in the form of a 'definitive text', to borrow a phrase from Martin Orwin (Orwin, 2003: 334), to make sure that it is 'protected against distortion by the rigid forms of the verse' (Andrzejewski, 1974: 4); and to take advantage of the powerful influence of verse among the Somali audience with the aim to get the message across. Another purpose identified by Andrzejewski is that a poetic insert may be used to express strong feelings in a moment of 'emotional intensity' (Andrzejewski, 1992:335). A highly emotional piece of poetry may be inserted as a soliloquy sung with music by a character undergoing emotional shake-up towards the end of a highly dramatic or melodramatic event in the play. One clear example is found in Shallaayo's tearful soliloquy lamenting her plight when Shabeel cruelly and unexpectedly deserts her and her unborn baby in scene 6 (p. 111-112).

Most poetic inserts in *Shabeelnaagood* occur within the dialogue where they constitute the larger and more profound part. The poetic parts of the dialogue are either sung in solo or duet with music accompaniment, or exchanged by the characters in their life-like conversations. Many of the songs composed as part of *Shabeelnaagood* became later popular songs presented separately in radio broadcasts or from audio cassettes (Cabdullaahi, 2001). On certain occasions poetic insertions also come in the form of introspective commentary, often in the aftermath of a dramatic event (see, for example, the passage by Shabeel at the end of scene 6, p. 115).

In his article on the role of poetic inserts in the novel *Aqoondarro waa u Nacab Jacayl*, Andrzejewski identified three situations in the plot in which poetic inserts occur. These are 'moments of dramatic tension, of emotional intensity and of narrative emphasis' (334-5). This is applicable to the use of poetic inserts in *Shabeelnaagood*. For example, the passage sung by Shallaayo following Shabeel's cruel response (Scene 6, pp. 110-12), came in a moment of both dramatic and emotional tension and it was inserted to intensify both. On the other hand, the major part of the poetic inserts in *Shaabeelnaagood* are inserted for thematic emphasis. Particularly, almost all of the numerous poetic passages exchanged by Diiddan and Diiddane serve this purpose, as we shall see below. One fine example is the song, *Dab Dhaxamooday* (When the Fire Feels Cold) in which the playwright articulates his critique of the political system in the country (see below for details). Other clear examples in this respect are the opening and closing glees, or the prologue and the epilogue.

The playwright's insertion of these two supplementary poetic pieces is so significant that it deserves to be discussed in a separate section, the one we shall now turn to. As poetry still forms the major constituent in each of the two next sections, the discussion of some of the points relating to the playwright's use of verse to enhance the delivery of his message are carried forward to these coming sections, to avoid or minimise possible overlap.

6.3.2.2 Prologue and epilogue as theatrical magnifiers

In his issue-oriented effort to engage supplementary devices aiming to reinforce the central plot, Xasan opens *Shabeelnaagood* with a well-designed prologue and winds it up with a moving epilogue. Complementing each other, as they do, the two components have the potential to capture the hearts and minds of the audience. While the epilogue performs the function of doubly ensuring the audience's grasp of the play's message, the prologue is designated to open up the hearts and minds of the spectators making them tuned right from the outset.

To give the audience an initial clue of his main concern in the play, the playwright

opens the performance with an interesting, opening glee where all members of the cast assemble, introducing their mission through a moving blend of orchestral music, powerful singing, instructive recitation of interlude verses, glamorous costumes and meaningful theatrical movements. All these various artistic elements combined in a beautiful harmony were certain to get the Somali audience into a highly receptive mood, as they actually confirmed through their explosive applause.[136]

Another significant confirmation of the powerfulness and successfulness of this artistic technique in the play is that the refrain of the song, *Walaalaha*, 'O, brothers and sisters' (see p. 44ff), which prominently features in the prologue, had been chosen as a signature tune or a permanent prelude for the Somali National Theatre since the performance of *Shabeelnaagood*. It became the signature tune with which people identified[137] for decades the plays performed by the highly popular Waaberi Artists, the once leading national artistic troupe, the biggest theatre company by far, from the beginning of the 1970s to the degeneration of Somalia by the beginning of the 1990s.

In this song, the playwright defines his role as an artist (in the collective tongue of the cast). The actors spell out the purpose of their mission, soliciting the appreciation of their audience by addressing them directly and emotionally. Upon lifting the curtains, to reveal the assembled members of the cast with their bright costumes, the orchestra takes charge with a penetrating prelude towards the end of which Diiddan steps forward coming closer to the audience. As the sound of music gives way to a momentary silence, generating a feeling of suspense, Diiddan (played by Hibo Maxamed) comes forward and addresses the audience, in a conversational manner, reciting a passage in which she speaks out for the cast unveiling their

136 This can be observed from the tape recording of one of the play's performances in Mogadishu. The playwright and the actors I interviewed (see above) have also confirmed this and gave me a full picture of what happened, refreshing my own memory of the performances of the play which I attended at the Mogadishu National Theatre

137 In a cultural festival held on 6 February 1999 at Barnet Somali Community Centre in North London, I was asked to give a talk on Somali theatre. As a supplementary illustration of what I was about to say, I played an audio recording of this song and I was not surprised to see several members of the audience, mostly middle-aged Somali women, bursting into tears, while many others expressed their uncontrollable nostalgic emotions in different ways, such as hysterically applauding, shouting or chanting to the music played by my cassette-player

professional identity or task:

> DIIDDAN*: Habeen iyo dharaar*
> *hadalladaan dhisnaa,*
> *Afkeenna hooyoo horuu maraan ku hoos caawinnaa,*
> *Hoggaaminnaa had iyo jeer hagnaa oo waan hagaajinaa,*
> *Ma hagranee waan u hawlgalnaa,*
> *Mmurtidaan hurinaa,*
> *Kala hufnaa haqab tirnaa u handannaa,*
> *Dadweynahaan hanuuninnaa haasaawinaa danta u hagnaa.*
>
> DIIDDAN: Night and day we fashion our words,
> In depth we help our advancing mother-tongue,
> We lead it, we always guide it, we set it right,
> We never shrink, we toil for it, we kindle the old wisdom,
> We winnow it, we satisfy its needs, we strive for it,
> We guide the public rightly, we entertain them and we lead them by the hand to profitable things. (p. 44-45).

At this point, the cast takes over, with musical accompaniment by the orchestra–they sing the chorus, the refrain that was set to be crowned later as the signature tune of all Somali plays performed by Waaberi Artists, as mentioned:

> HOOBALLADA*: Walaalaha hanuunsanow,*
> *waan idinla haynaa is hurina maynee,*
> *Halkan waxaad u timaaddeen*
> *Aan hagar lahayn baad caawa naga helaysaan!*
>
> CAST: Oh rightly guided brothers [and sisters], we give you our support.
> You and we cannot do without each other, and what you have come here to find
> You will get from us tonight without stint (Ibid.).

By the end of the refrain each time, Diiddan comes forward again to recite the next solo passage, as follows:

> DIIDDAN*: Buraanbur iyo hees*
> *Heelliyo ciyaar*
> *Gabayo haybadliyo, hallaali baanu hindisnaa*
> *Lama huraan hilinka toosan baan, barbaarta u horgallaa.*
> *Ma hagranee waan iwm.*
>
> DIIDDAN: *Buraanbur* and *hees, heello*
> poems and dance songs
> We compose, and *gabay*s illustrious and significant.
> We go in the forefront of youth along the straight path which is

indispensable.
We never shirk, we toil for it, we kindle the old wisdom,
We winnow it, we satisfy its needs, we strive for it,
We guide the public rightly, we entertain them and we lead them by the hand to profitable things (ibid).

HOOBAllADA*: Walaalaha hanuunsanow*

CAST: Oh rightly guided brothers
.
DIIDDAN*: Taariikhda hiddeheennaan*
habaaska ka tirnaa
Hannaankii aan ku soo dhaqmeyney baa u hiillinaa
Hurdadaan guyaal ka haayirnaa, naftayadaan hurnaa.
Ma hagranee.
DIIDDAN: We wipe the dust from the
history of our heritage,
We give help to the upright way in which we have been reared.
For years we have had no sleep because of it, we wholly dedicate ourselves to it.
We never shrink, we toil for it, we kindle the old wisdom,
We winnow it, we satisfy its needs, we strive for it,
We guide the public rightly, we entertain them and we lead them by the hand to profitable things (ibid).

HOOBALLADA*: Walaalaha hanuunsanow*
. . . . . .
.
CAST: Oh rightly guided brothers
. . . . . .
(pp. 44-47)

A close look at the above text leads us to observe the frequency of and the emphasis on the words and phrases meant to underscore the guiding role of the presenters. That is what one can gather from the use of words and phrases such as '*hanuuninnaa*' (we raise awareness), '*hagnaa*' (we guide), '*horgallaa*' (we go in the forefront, '*hoggaaminaa*' (we lead), '*danta u hagnaa*' (we lead them [the public] by the hand to profitable things). All of these expressions are used to the same effect, i.e., to emphasise that the artists are there to guide the public to the right path through the performance of this play.

This indicates how message-focused is the playwright and how consciously he acts as a torch-bearer, as guidance provider. Furthermore, the emphasised use of words

and expressions to this effect extends throughout the play right to the closing song, the epilogue, where the playwright even more rigorously articulates his (and his fellow artists') 'guiding' position and their committedness to 'expose' the wrongs of society, which Diiddan enlists in the epilogue, to 'sever the necks of spiteful malefactors', to 'winnow right from wrong' (p. 215).

Thus the epilogue is set to complement the prologue and shed more light on crucial points. It does not come merely as a 'farewell' gesture marking the end of the performance. More profoundly, the playwright uses it as a magnifier summarising the core of his instructive message in the way we shall see shortly.

As in the opening glee, the entire cast assembles once again on stage, following the scene that concludes the plot enactment. The setting is highly impressive, more or less the same as that of the prologue. The performance procedures follow a similar pattern, except that, due to the fortified capacity of the epilogue, as well as the heightened intensity of the theatrical atmosphere, one more soloist (Diiddane) is added to Diiddan (who reappears as the leading soloist) and the chorus gets more assertive. This time the piece opens with the chorus, with the whole cast bursting with a self-assertive pronouncement in defence of the Somali tradition. This is followed by a direct didactic assertion in which the artists declare their determination to launch an attack against the prevailing evils in society:

> HOOBALLADA: *Habran mayno oo dhaqanka, waan u hawl gelaynaa*
> *Hurdow toos! Hurdow toos! Hurdow toos!*
> *Xaqiyo baadilkaan kala hufaynaa!*
>
> CAST: We shall not hold back, we shall toil for our heritage.
> Awake, you who are asleep! Awake, you who are asleep!
> Awake, you who are asleep!
> We are winnowing right from wrong! (p. 212 – 213).

At the end of each presentation of this choral refrain, a soloist (Diiddan or Diiddane) steps forward to recite a passage focusing on one particular issue raised in the main body of the play. Alternately presented by a male and female soloists, two professional singers with powerful voices (Hibo Maxamed and Cabdi Muxumud

Amiin, who play Diiddan and Diiddane respectively), these poetic passages are well-organised. Complementing each other in a progressive succession, the five passages are designed to sum up the overall message of the play, commenting on almost all the main issues in a well compiled list. Diiddane is first to come forward with his first, base-setting stanza:

> DIIDDANE: *Hawraarta loo maro murtida hadalka soo koobta*
> *Hees iyo buraanbur iyo gabay, heello iyo jiifto*
> *Hidaha iyo taariikhaha, lagu hadaaqaayo*
> *Halyeyadii habeeyey ee, higgaaddooda kala qaybshay*
> *Dhaxalkoodii baan haysannaa, hilinkii toosnaa ye.*
>
> DIIDDANE: The art of speech, the words
> which sum up wisdom,
> The verses of *hees,*[138] *buraanbur,*[139] *gabay,*[140] *heello,*[141] and *jiifto,*[142]
> The ancestral lore and history which children learn with speech,
> The champions who gave guidance and dispensed their well-ordered words,
> We keep all inheritance - that straight path.
> We shall not hold back, we shall toil for our heritage
> (ibid).
> CAST: We shall not hold back, we shall toil
> for our heritage.
> Awake, you who are asleep! Awake, you who are asleep!
> Awake, you who are asleep!
> We are winnowing right from wrong! (212 – 13).

Clearly, the initial passage by Diiddane is designated to register the dramatists' commitment to stand for his cultural heritage and traditional values, acknowledging that in whatever they–the current artists– do, they rest on the established tradition and on the body of accumulated knowledge that has resulted from the efforts made by past generations of gifted people, by 'the champions who gave guidance'.

This further underlining in the play's conclusion of the importance of cultural

138 Song.
139 A traditional genre of women's poetry, still the lead genre for female poets.
140 The lead genre of classical verse.
141 The name '*heello*' was used traditionally for dance songs; later, during the 1950s it was adopted for modern songs.
142 Another poetic genre currently favoured by many poets.

heritage demonstrates the strong preservative tendency of the playwright. Interestingly, however, unlike other poets/playwrights, who are unable to see the weaknesses and imperfections of the past in their concentration on the romanticised 'glory' and 'purity' of the good old days, Xasan presents the traditional culture as a double-edged sword. This is very important as it indicates the transitional status of the playwright.

In this important song, he strikes a delicate balance between the strengths and weaknesses of Somali tradition. While on the one hand he advocates the preservation of the most valuable assets of Somali heritage, he, on the other hand, warns against the dangerous loopholes of the same inheritance, against the dark elements found in certain aspects of the tradition, aspects of the old mind-set that pose serious hurdles to any future progress. Xasan presents the darker side of Somali inheritance in the third stanza, where he resentfully attacks these aspects of the old tradition hindering progress. The playwright identifies and criticises such inherited evils as tribalism in the words of Diiddane as follows:

> DIIDDANE: *Hawo madhan qabyaalad iyo hayb, haybad lagu waaye*
> *Hawshii timaadda iyo dhibtii, hibasho reebaysa*
> *Haddaan laga hortagin goor dambaa. lagu halaagmaa ye*
> *Halkaan haabanayno iyo, asluubteenii waxa haysta*
> *Waa laba hab oo kala fog oon haab isku lahayn e.*
>
> DIIDDANE: Vainglory, tribalism, and pride in
> ancestry do not ensure achievement,
> The toil that is one's lot, the trouble that leaves behind,
> Unless one goes out to face them one will perish through them in time.
> The goal to which we stretch our hands and our true behaviour
> Are two things far apart which have no common bond (pp. 214 – 215).

Here, it is important to note that Xasan Shiikh Muumin's attack against 'tribalism' and pride in ancestry' clearly indicates the modern influence in the playwright's world view, while on the other hand the same song clearly displays the influence of tradition in the playwright's mind-set. In this connection, the epilogue provides us with further evidence of the obvious presence in *Shabeelnaagood* of opposing influences of tradition and modernity, hence our regarding it as transitional in

nature.

Further evidence demonstrating the stated mixed influence is that launches an equally ferocious attack against the dark side of modern influence in contemporary Somalis. Indeed, the destructive behaviour acquired by the new urban Somalis, especially townsmen, with misconceived perception of modern lifestyle, constitutes the main focus of the entire play, as explained. In the excerpt that follows, Diiddan sums up the main recently-emerged ills dramatised in the principal plot:

> DIIDDAN: *Hurjumada haraatida dahsoon, hugunka gaagaaban*
> *Hagardaamada iyo beenta, sheekada hadhqoodaarka*
> *Nikaaxa hadoodilan gabdhaha, lagu hallaynaayo*
> *Hallasaha qarsoon ee jilfaha, lagu hagoogaayo*
> *Hataqada inaan muujinaa, way habboontahaye.*
>
> DIIDDAN: Kicking in hidden onslaughts,
> muted voices,
> Wanton attacks, lies, gossip behind the houses,
> Clandestine marriages, by which girls are led astray,
> Hot embers, camouflaged with bark fibres,
> Obstacles set up – all these it's our duty to expose.
>
> HOOBALLADA: *Habran mayno oo dhaqanka, waan u hawl gelaynaa*
> *Hurdow toos! Hurdow toos! Hurdow toos!*
> *Xaqiyo baadilkaan kala hufaynaa!*
>
> CAST: We shall not hold back,
> We shall not hold back, we shall toil
> for our heritage.
> Awake, you who are asleep! Awake, you who are asleep!
> Awake, you who are asleep!
> We are winnowing right from wrong! (212 – 13).

In the last two stanzas, the performers place further emphasis on introducing themselves as artists, on their 'vanguard'[143] role as tireless combatants against all of the said maladies, whether old or new:

> DIIDDAN: *Haddaan nahay haleeyada gabyiyo, hooballada heesa*
> *Halosiga dadweynuhu markuu, talo ku haasaawo*
> *Maalintii hayaan loo lallabo, oon faraska heensayno*
> *Rabbi naguma hoojee libtuu, nagu hagaaja ye*
> *Dawadaan helnaa xaasadkaan, hanaqa goynaa ye.*

143 This point of the artists' self-promotion will be elaborated very shortly.

DIIDDAN: We who are the champions of
poetry, the singers,
When people are debating what they ought to do,
On the very day when things are packed for the trek and we saddle our horses
God does not lead us to perdition; He brings us to victory –
We find the right remedies and sever the necks of spiteful malefactors (pp. 214 – 215).

CAST: We shall not hold back, etc.

DIIDDANE: *Horraysiyo dambaysaba horsed, heeganaan nahaye*
Dabkaan hurinay Somaali, hooduu u leeyahay e
Sidii hebedka naaskiisa kii hoos galiba nuugo
Habran mayno oo dhaqanka kwd.

DIIDDANE: For what was before us and
What will come after we are an ever ready vanguard,
The fire which we have kindled is a gift to all Somalis.
We are like a kindly milch beast which suckles any calf which comes under her.
We shall not hold back, etc.

CAST: We shall not hold back, etc. (ibid).

In addition to the underlining, in a summarised fashion, of the main issues in the play, the epilogue performs another function. This impressively concluding scene reinforced the final impact of the play on its audience. As they go home, and perhaps beyond, the echo of the moving words and the image of the breath-taking scene would follow them and stay with them, perhaps, for years to come.

Indeed, after nearly four decades, I myself still retain the images of this closing scene of *Shabeelnaagood*. I can 'see' myself as a school boy standing up beside my older brother, Ahmed, among a huge crowd of an extremely excited audience at the National Theatre. As the assembled cast of much loved national stars vigorously repeated, with the thunderous beats of the drum, the last line in the refrain:

Hurdow toos xaqiyo baadilkaan kala hufaynaay e!

Awake, you who are asleep!
We are winnowing right from wrong!

I remember how we, the audience, were totally taken away by emotions, most of us hysterically and continuously clapping, others overwhelmed by tears, while dozens of young people, both men and women, including myself, rushed up the stage, awarding gifts (our watches etc) to the members of the cast, or enthusiastically embracing the actors and the singers one after the other in a virtually involuntary expression of overwhelming appreciation.

This is a typical example of how emotionally involved the Somali audience is in theatrical experiences. This audience comes from all walks of life, from the head of state to the man in the street. In his *Heelloy*, John Johnson (1996) comments on the performance of an 'extremely popular' Somali play called *Indha-sarcaad*, (The Haze), composed by Cali Sugulle in 1962; Johnson remarks that the Prime Minister of the time, Cabdirashiid Cali Sharmaarke, 'who attended the play more than once, wept with emotion during the performance.' (p. 169n).

In the wording and the overall diction of the two songs above, the prologue and the epilogue, put together, what may sound an overstatement of the role of the theatre and theatre practitioners is understandable if one takes into consideration the fact that in the 1960s, when *Shabeelnaagood* was performed, modern stage drama was a relatively new art form in Somalia; it was still struggling to establish itself, to take its secure seat among respected forms of cultural expression in Somali society. Although it was already popular by the time (1968), especially with the younger generation and the with the open-minded people, the theatre was still faced with continued opposition by the more conservative sections of Somali society, particularly, by the influential segment of elders and men of religion, both of whom had continued their fight against the modern-oriented performers, depicting them as new evils who were there to spoil the youth by involving them in 'something against Somali and Islamic culture' (Abdilahi, 1996: xi).

The new art was even opposed by some leading poets belonging to the older generation, as expressed in the following contemptuous line in which the late acclaimed poet, Cabdillaahi Suldaan Timacadde (q.v.), attacks the new artists: '*Maansada qaraamigan yaryare qayliyaa dilay e*' [Poetry is killed by those little

qaraami singers shouting around]. Andrzejewski and Lewis (1964: 151-153) provide a detailed description of how the older generation rejected the emergence of the art to the extent of composing poems denouncing it.

Taking this situation into account, it is quite understandable that Xasan Shiikh Muumin and his fellow performers had to clear the name of the new art and artists; i.e. to make it crystal clear to everyone that they were not there to spoil the youth but to 'go in the forefront of youth along the straight path' (p. 45). They wanted to say loudly, 'we are not just "shouting around", on the contrary, 'we wholly dedicate ourselves to' the good cause of educating our people as well as entertaining them: 'We guide the public rightly, we entertain them and we lead them by the hand to profitable things', 'For years we have had no sleep because of it' (p. 45). The magnitude of the unspeakable devotion and the heart-felt pain implied in the untranslatable Somali expression '*naftayadaan hurnaa*' (p. 44) (roughly, we consecrate our soul [to educating and entertaining our people]), is utterly moving.

Seen from another angle, the degree of the performers' self-assertiveness in wordings such as 'we the champions of poetry . . .', 'we are an ever ready vanguard [p. 215]' and so forth, reminds us of the customary poetic boasting commonly practised by classical poets, as discussed in chapter 3. Clearly, the influence of such a tradition is not absent here, owing to the closeness of Somali transitional dramatists to the traditional culture.

However, we must take note of two significant differences in this connection. First, in place of the classical poet's personal boasting, which focused on the individual poet's self-promotion, what we find here is a self-assertive group focusing on the promotion of a noble profession, from their point of view. The plural pronoun 'we' has replaced the classical poet's self-centred singular pronoun 'I', and it is apparent from the overall context that in their saying 'we' the contemporary dramatists do not speak just for themselves as a troupe but for all artists, and indeed for the community at large. Their speaking in the collective tongue is indicative of their orientation to strive for the communal interests, for what the author has termed

‘*danta*’ (p. 44), the general well-being of the nation and of humanity by extension. This kind of collective poetic boasting, which emanates from such a modern concept, is indeed a significant new artistic aspect, one which shows the union of traditional and modern elements in Somali post-independence drama, another indication for the transitional footing of this art form.

Seen from yet another perspective, the departure from the individually-based poetic boasting here, can be seen as something prescribed by the very nature of the theatre as a communally practised art, unlike, say, the poetry which is often created and transmitted on an individual basis. The theatre is an art form which depends for its existence on the joint efforts of so many people, from the scriptwriter and producer to the various stage technicians through all those troops of actors, musicians, singers, dancers and so forth. Even the audience is an essential part in the final product of a work of stage drama. Hence, it is only normal that such a communal environment inspires a sense of collective being in the minds of play-makers.

6.3.2.3 Subordinate plot for thematic emphasis

This is one more feature emphasising the centrality of the message in *Shabeelnaagood*. Alongside the principal plot, led by Shabeel and Shallaayo, the author has constructed a well thought out sub-plot driven by two important characters, Diiddan and Diiddane, to be instrumental in further highlighting the crucial problems of Somali transitional society dealt with in the play. The sub-plot fulfils the stated purpose on two levels: commenting on or further underlining the central ideas expressed in the principal plot, and highlighting some additional, relevant issues which the playwright might not see as being compatible with the main plot; for instance, it might not be easy to merge in the main story line the song *Dab Dhaxamooday* (When the Fire Feels Cold) in which the playwright expresses his fierce critique against the political establishment (see below for details). From structural point of view, the follow of the principal storyline would not allow the inclusion of this passage as an exchange between Shabeel and Shallaayo, while in the sub-plot it came in a natural location where Diiddane and Diiddan were positioned to sing it in duet. The same applies to songs such as ‘*Xaq miyaa*?’ (Is it

Legitimate?) in the subordinate plot (pp. 92 – 93).

On the first level the subordinate plot provides more focused commentaries on two crucial problems dramatised in the central plot. The first is the victimisation of young women by heartless playboys, and the second is the family disintegration following the collapse of modern marriage in the fast burgeoning Somali towns 'where it [family life] is deprived of the traditional support [and protection] it has in the rural interior' (Andrzejewski, 1985: 364).

To dramatise the latter problem the playwright devises in the sub-plot yet another sub-plot or sub-sub-storyline the events of which take place off-stage. This is the story of a little boy abandoned by his divorced parents, as the result of the breakdown of their marriage. Diiddan and Diiddane find the street child, crying of hunger and grief:

> DIIDDAN: What happened to you?
> BOY: I'm hungry!
> DIIDDAN: Don't you have a mother?
> BOY: No!
> DIIDDAN: Or father?
> BOY: No!
> DIIDDAN: Did they die?
> BOY: NO!
> DIIDDAN: I take refuge from Satan with God! . . . What is this about–'I've no father and I've no mother'? Did they die?
> BOY: No, they didn't die.
> DIIDDANE: Listen –
> BOY: Yes?
> DIIDDANE [*to* DIIDDAN]: He's just a little child–let me ask him.
> DIIDDAN: Ask him, then.
> DIIDDANE: Well, nephew[144]--
> BOY: Yes?
> DIIDDANE: Don't play about with us! Now, I'm telling you–you said to us 'I've
>
> no father and I have no mother, and they didn't die.' What do you mean when you say that? What happened to you? (pp. 141 – 3).

144 In Somali culture, such words as *adeer* (nephew) and *eeddo* (niece) are used by adults when addressing a child in a caring way; on the other hand, children and young adults use the name (for uncle and aunt respectively) when addressing older people to show respect.

Here comes the child's crucial answer with which the subordinate melodrama reaches its tragic climax. It is where the playwright wants to artistically yet explicitly deliver his stressed message against family disintegration by depicting its disastrous impact on young children:

> BOY: My mother is married to another man,
> and my father has another wife. When I go to my mother, her husband chases me away, and when I go to my father his wife chases me away! (p. 143).

The effect of such a heart-breaking depiction of the child's plight on us as audience is further accelerated by Diiddan's overwhelmingly emotional response:

> DIIDDAN [*to* Diiddane *With her hand on her heart*]: Oh God! Touch my heart!
> Touch my heart! Oh God! Touch my heart! Oh Diiddane! Oh God!
> DIIDDANE *[putting his arm around her*]: Oh God!
> DIIDDAN: Oh, Diiddane, ever since I learned to keep away from fire,
> Of all that ever hurt me, this today was worst!
> Look at my eyes, which are raining tears,
> Spreading over my cheek like a stream in spate.
> May you not be undone, oh Diiddane! Don't you grieve at this with me?
> Look closely at this boy and touch my heart! Oh God! How terrible! (ibid).

Furthermore, it is in the following poetic passage by Diiddane, in response to Diiddan, that the playwright masterfully focuses on some of his major concerns in the play. Through Diiddane, Xasan skilfully makes the tragedy of the little boy perceived within the context of the broader problem of family disintegration and its devastating impact on children. The playwright also utilises the poetic exchange to more directly comment on, in the words of Diiddane, the other problem of victimisation of innocent girls by heartless men, which is the central theme in the principal plot:

> DIIDDANE: Yes, Diiddan, but be still now.
> I shall say this to you –
> Those tears raining from your eyes, oh, Diiddan,
> And your trembling flesh, are they not just in

woman's nature?
Don't you know this country? Do you live sheltered behind a screen?
Here is this poor boy, worn out and exhausted,
Abandoned by his parents; if his plight gives you pain,
Think, he is a man and can find his postures, he will snatch things from the streets with the other paupers,
If death leaves him be, there is no need to fear for him.
But when I consider, oh, Diiddan, something else even more evil,
My spirit wearies, my heart is torn and lips tremble.
How many a fragrant girl, golden and secure,
Loved by her people, some men have furtively approached
And set an evil trap for her, destroying her honour
And when she found her taste growing bitter, and saw her belly,
She hanged herself and left this world!
How many a fine baby that you would take for a full moon
Has been fettered with rope and cast into the open,
and beasts of prey have torn it asunder.
How many a crying boy, after they had wrapped him in wool,
When all were asleep, they put into a basket
And propped it against the wall – then as dawn came
He was found by people who took him to the Christian priests.[145]
And when he grew up he did not know his people
And denies he is Somali! (p. 145).

Diiddane concludes his critique with two didactic lines in which the playwright precisely 'sums up' his prescriptive message, the bottom line of the entire play:

DIIDDANE: . . . Let me not make you
Weary – sum it all up!
Those who bear the guilt for the evil we described
Should now desist from it–that is what we must struggle for!
DIIDDAN: That's right! We must all struggle for it, mustn't we?
DIIDDANE: We must (ibid).

145 Professor Andrzejewski (1974: 228n1) explains what is meant by the 'Christian priests' referred to here: 'The reference here is to an Italian missionary orphanage in Mogadishu. In the past some of the children brought up grew up to be more Italian than Somali, but others became fully integrated into Somali society and among them are several prominent public figures. Since independence full integration has become a recognised aim of their upbringing.'

Here by articulating such a vigorous poetic statement the playwright is going one step further from commenting on the appalling state of affairs in his country to calling for action to reverse it. This is the bottom line of his message in the play. This kind of focused commentary on the crucial social problems dealt with in the main plot is provided in almost all the different scenes in the subordinate plot throughout the play.

In addition to the social maladies, the playwright fiercely criticises a legion of prevailing political excesses such as corruption and injustice. To express his political criticism in an artistic way, cautious of the government's censorship, the playwright makes use of his poetic skills and also employs a number of other useful techniques derived from the established oral tradition, such as riddles. He combines all of these in a well-built song with musical accompaniment sung in duet by Diiddane and Diiddan in the sub-plot. This is one of the aspects developed in the subordinate plot more clearly than in the main plot. The well known song, *Dab Dhaxamooday* (When the Fire Fees Cold) is constructed in the form of riddles exchanged by Diiddane and Diiddan. Each stanza or passage, recited by Diiddane in the form of a question answered by Diiddan, is designated to focus on one of the political ills targeted by the playwright, with the use of veiled language. Symbolic expressions such as '*dab dhaxamooday*' (p. 62) (the fire that feels cold) (p. 63), '*durdur oomay*' ibid) (the water/stream that feels thirsty), '*dawo bukootay*' (p. 46) (the medicine that feels ill). I will discuss this song in more detail, with extracts from the text in the section on riddles below.

Despite the fact that *Shabeelnaagood* can best be described as a social satire, its political undertone is unmistakable. As Xasan Skiikh Muumin himself points out, '*siyaasaddu way ku dhex dhuumaneysey*' (the political critique was contained underneath) (Xasan, 1997). In the main plot, one of the locations where such political critique is 'contained underneath' is at the end of scene 9 (pp. 136-9) where the judge expresses his frustration and discontent with the injustice and inefficiencies of the current judicial system in the country and, by extension, the political regime of the time. This is apparent from the sub-text of the judge's comments, such as '*muraayad cayn xun baa naga saaran annaga*' (We have had the

wrong spectacles put over our eyes!) (pp. 136, 137).

Here, 'the wrong spectacles' that delude the judge into releasing Shabeel, the culprit, symbolises the government of the time who must be blamed either for binding the necessary autonomy of the judiciary or for the failure to put in place modern legislation capable of meeting the new challenges in contemporary Somali society. In either case, the playwright's underlying message is obvious: a political and judicial reform is needed if the prevailing social ills in the new Somali society are to be eradicated.

6.3.2.4 Didactic instruction veiled with humour

The fourth technique employed by the playwright to get his message in an amusing manner is humour. Sense of humour is one of the skills attributed to Somalis by foreign observers. Carlos Mavrolean argues that 'Perhaps the only thing in Somalia that has not been destroyed by the war is the national sense of humour.' (Mavrolean, 1992: 21). Confirming the existence of such a sense of humour and identifying factors behind it, Charles Geshekter writes,

> Along with mental acuity, physical courage and religious faith, a sense of humour ranked high among the various skills cultivated to cope with the pressures of disasters and constant mobility necessary for pastoral success (Geshekter, 1996: 143).

Among the Somalis, dramatists may be considered to be the most skilled when it comes to a sense of humour. The most salient feature of most plays produced in post-independence Somalia is their humour or comic nature, irrespective of the degree of seriousness in their themes, and this is best illustrated in *Shabeelnaagood.*

During the first years of modern Somali drama, the Somali name used for a dramatic performance on the stage was *maadeys*, (Andrzejewski, 1974: 3) which is derived from *maad*, (humour). The literal meaning of *maadeys* is 'making people laugh'; it means 'humour', 'amusement', 'entertainment'. This naming was indeed accurate in

the sense that humour is one of the prominent and permanent features of Somali drama. Even in most serious situations we always find profoundly comic elements. You cannot be a successful actor/actress unless you demonstrate humorous skills, no matter how serious is the role you play.

In the preceding sections I have focused on how the *abwaan* or the poet/playwright in Somali literary tradition has tended to emphasise the instructive message. To substantiate this, I have discussed how Xasan Shiikh Muumin has represented such a tradition in his dealing with contemporary social issues in *Shabeelnaagood.* This may give the wrong impression that Somali drama in general and *Shabeelnaagood* in particular is but a stiff preaching of social ideals. This however is far from being the case. It would be a mistake to assume that the Somali drama in question is in bondage to its thematic preoccupation, that its *raison d'etre* is the 'message' and nothing else.

In fact one striking characteristic of the Somali stage drama is its satirical and comic nature and *Shabeelnaagood* is a truly representative play. In spite of the paramountcy of the instructive message in this play, it remains aligned with the rest of Somali social plays in its satirical and comic nature. While Xasan Shiikh Muumin aimed to champion social reform, he did so through satire and comedy, with an overwhelming sense of humour. With the exception of Shallaayo, who could be described as a modern tragic heroine, most characters defy categorisation as being either comic or serious; indeed they are both. Even in the darkest moments, the supposedly most serious character, Shabeel the villain is wickedly funny. Almost anything he utters makes the audience laugh to tears.

For instance, consider how funny are Shabeel's attitude and his sarcastically brief and amusingly twisted answers[146] in the following situation where, in the midst of the court proceedings, in such an extremely serious situation, where Shallaayo is totally

146 Here, we must note that the success of the comic aspect of the play should not be attributed to the playwright alone; in fact, much must be attributed to the talents and the skills of the actors. The irresistably humorous flavour in the words spoken by Shabeel comes out of the comic talent or sense of humour of the late Cabdulle Raage, who played Shabeel and who wittily improvised most such laughter-inducing dialogue lines in prose.

devastated and everyone, including the judge, is moved by a powerless sense of sympathy, the judge starts his questions to Shabeel:

> QAADDI: *Magacaa, walaalkaygii*?
> SHABEEL: *Faral miyaa inaan kuu sheego?*
> QAADDI: *Haa, maxkamadda ku faral weeye.*
> SHABEEL: Shabeel.
> QAADDI: Shabeel, *ma taqaan gabadhaan*?
> SHABEEL: *Gabar lee ahaa*!
> QAADDI: *Haye, ma taqaan, ama hore ma u aragtay? Aqoon ma u leedahay?*
> SHABEEL: *Markii hadda ay warqadda sidey ka hor ma arkin, ka dib na arki maayo.*
> QAADDI: *Haye gabadha, ninkaan maxaad ku dacweyneysey?*
> SHALLAAYO: *Shiikh, haddee waxaan ku dacweynayo wa anigii hore kuu sheegay.*
> QAADDI: *Isagoo maqlaya sheeg*!
>
> JUDGE: . . . What is your name, brother?
> SHABEEL: Am I obliged to tell you?
> JUDGE: Yes, it is obligatory in a court of law.
> SHABEEL: Shabeel.
> JUDGE: Shabeel, do you know this girl?
> SHABEEL: Well, she's a girl.
> JUDGE: Now, do you know her? Have you seen her before–have you any knowledge of her?
> SHABEEL: I had never seen her before she came to me with the letter just now, and I shall never see her again.
>
> JUDGE [*to Shallaayo]*: What is your complaint against this man?
> SHALLAAYO: I told you before what I was complaining about.
> JUDGE: Say it in his hearing (pp.128 - 9).

The conversation between Shallaayo and the judge goes on; Shallaayo goes through her tragic story about how Shabeel has ruined her life and the judge would ask her more questions; he then resumes his questions to Shabeel and the latter starts throwing his funny, brief answers:

> JUDGE: You are charged under article 81--[147]
> SHABEEL: And you are charged under article 90!
> JUDGE: If the defendant denies the plaintiff's accusations, and the

147 At the time, the laws of the Somali state were codified and it was customary to quote the appropriate articles and paragraphs by their numbers in legal discourses and judgements.

plaintiff
has no Witnesses, in that case what is obligatory? It is [*in Arabic*] *wajaba-*
yamiinu, alqasam.[148] 'The oath is required, the sworn statement.' An oath can
clear you in this case–you will take an oath.

SHABEEL: You and I will both take an oath. Can I ask you a question before
we reach the point of taking the oath?
JUDGE: No!
SHABEEL: It is essential that you should be asked a question.
JUDGE: Either take an oath or admit the charge!
SHABEEL: We are going to agree on one of those two only!
JUDGE: Either take an oath or admit the charge!
SHABEEL: Shall I admit something that is a lie?
JUDGE: Either take an oath or admit the charge! Put your hand on this Holy
Book.
There is no need for you, sir, to talk so much!
SHABEEL: You yourself must take an oath!
JUDGE: Take an oath about what?
SHABEEL: You must take an oath that you did not officiate at this girl's
marriage to me the other day at Buur Karore at half-past seven in the evening!
JUDGE [*laughing*]: That is a new one! A case is being heard against *you*–
when a case is brought against *me*, I shall defend myself!
SHABEEL: But a case against you is going on now!
JUDGE: No, you are the defendant now. You go first before me – go on!
SHABEEL: Let us hold the Holy Book for each other by turns. When it's your
turn hold it for me – let us not get confused about it! (pp. 132-3).

That is how *Shabeelnaagood* manages to treat profoundly serious matters through irresistibly humorous exchanges, humorous especially to someone familiar with the cultural and situational background. The above conversation may not sound that funny to a non-Somali, reading it in translation; the Somali audience, however, who watched the live performance and who shared with the performers the background knowledge,

148 The purpose of the use of Arabic here is two-fold: to render more emphasis and authenticity to the statement which is based on the Islamic law, written in Arabic, and to give the conversation a humorous touch by satirically mimicking the Islamic judges who tend to sprinkle their Somali with Arabic with the aim of boasting of their uncommon knowledge of the holy language.

kept laughing to tears. As remarked by Shuaib Kidwai, this was one of the factors behind the success and the popularity of *Shabeelnaagood* with its Somali audience. 'The success of the play lies in a fine blending of entertainment and instruction. The audience does not feel that it is being lectured to. We accept and appreciate the moral precepts presented through songs and witty dialogues' (Kidwai, 1992: 355).

Let us consider another situation where extremely shocking news evolves from hilariously funny conversation. In Scene 5, Shallaayo's mother, Shammado, is very worried about the deteriorating health state of her daughter, not knowing that she is suffering from symptoms of early pregnancy from a man she is not married to. The mother calls in a female nurse, Kulmiya, to find out what is wrong with the girl. The beginning of the conversation between the two ladies is very humorous. One of the many comic elements in the scene is the communication gap between the two ladies, between the traditional, old lady, with no formal education and the young, half-educated nurse who irrelevantly shows off her knowledge of both medicine and the English language, while the way she speaks unveils to the audience that her knowledge of each is very limited:

> KULMIYA [*taking a notebook out of her pocket*]*:* Tell me what she eats!
> SHAMMADO: Are you going to write it down?
> KULMIYA: Eh? Do you imagine that medical knowledge is something of no
> value? I was learning for [*exited, she breaks into English*] *three years! What you mean!*
> SHAMMADO [*not comprehending*]: My dear women, slowly, please, as you
> speak to me in Arabic.
> KULMIYA [*still in English*]*: Tell me please!* [*In Somali*] Speak, speak, speak!
> SHAMMADO: [*still confused]:* My dear, do you know, although I'm a townswoman, I don't know well that Italian you are talking to me.
> KULMIYA: [*In Italian*] *mi dispiace*. I told you to speak to me. Tell me quickly!
> SHAMMADO: She eats peppers –
> KULMIYA: Yes?
> SHAMMADO: And underdone liver –
> KULMIYA: What, what?
> SHAMMADO: Peppers, underdone liver, potatoes, papaw, egg plant, and

fritters. She sometimes gets heartburn from those – she gets mortally sick from
them, but she loves them.

KULMIYA [*forgetting herself and again speaking half in English*]: *Listen,*
what are fritters? What is the meaning of fritters?

SHAMMADO [*Annoyed*]*:* Haven't I told you not to speak to me again in
Italian?
KULMIYA: What I said to you was this–what are those fried lentils[149] you
mentioned?
SHAMMADO: Ha, ha, ha! You were away for only two years and now you
don't know what fritters are! May misfortune descend on you!
KULMIYA: Where is the girl?
SHAMMADO: She is in that room. [*Pointing off-stage and* Kulmiya *goes out*
to examine Shallaayo. Shammado *mimics her awkward and masculine gait*
by movements and by onomatopoeic words]. Mulukh malakh! [*Loud sounds*
of vomiting are heard.] Come, woman, that's a strange symptom! [*More*
sounds of vomiting, then Kulmiya *returns.*] Come my dear! Now then–tell me
about it.

KULMIYA: I've examined her–the girl doesn't need any medicine.
SHAMMADO: But dear, she is very ill.
KULMIYA: It's a calamity which you were not expecting! (pp. 96 – 103).

Here, the audience is aware that what Kulmiya is referring to and concealing from Shammado is that she found the girl pregnant. As I explained in chapter 5, Somali/Muslim culture does not tolerate pregnancy outside marriage, more so in the case of a girl at the age of Shallaayo. Nothing could be more devastating to a mother than the news of her young daughter being pregnant with a man she is not married to. That is why the nurse, Kulmiya, is hesitant to directly deliver the extremely bad news to Shammado.

149 Kulmiya ridiculously confuses *digirsaliid* (fried lentils), which does not exist, with *bursaliid* (fritters), which is a popular food in Somalia. She pretends that she does not know the latter.

Before Kulmiya fully discloses what the 'unexpected calamity' was, the humorous conversation goes on for about two pages between the two women who are worlds apart. For example, when Kulmiya says to Shammado that 'someone has interfered with her [daughter]', meaning that she had a sex with a man, the mother gets it wrong, that the girl was being "interfered with" by "the Spell of the Envious Eye!"

The scene reaches its dramatic peak and resumes its original tragic orientation when Kulmiya decides to directly come to the point:

> KULMIYA: I think we've been talking at cross purposes. Let me tell you,
> your daughter is pregnant!
> SHAMMADO [*utterly shocked*]: I confess that there is no God but God!
> KULMIYA: She is in her fourth month.
> SHAMMADO: My God! May I be undone! I didn't take any notice of all
> those peppers and that underdone liver! My God, where shall I go in this
> world? And have I got to face Xaaji Guuleed?[150] Oh God!

That is how the playwright succeeded in delivering his serious message in a humorous discourse. He depicts the devastating consequence of Shabeel's villainy through the irresistibly funny conversation between Shammado and Kulmiya. At the same time he ridicules, through the same dialogue, Kulmiya's pompous behaviour and her irrelevant boasting of knowledge of foreign languages. This must be particularly amusing to an audience who shared with the playwright his rejection of the behaviour of the then newly emerged group of town-dwellers or half-educated 'who like to air a scanty knowledge of foreign languages and who will use them even in conversation with other Somalis, and the poets, playwrights, and broadcasters pillory such abuses as pompous foolishness' (Andrzejewski, 1974: 24).

6.4 Engaging traditional culture to dramatise modern themes

As Derek Wright asserts, 'Somali oral tradition is not fossilized in the past but is a

150 Xaaji Guuleed is Shammado's husband, Shallaayo's father, who is still away on the pilgrimage.

dynamic influence, contemporaneous with the present in which it is constantly renewed' (Wright, 1994: 15). In *Shabeelnaagood* important elements and materials drawn from Somali oral tradition are 'renewed' and reproduced as building blocks for the construction of a new work of art, a play treating issues of modern Somali society. Such a combination of old and new elements in an organic unity is another import aspect of *Shabeelnaagood* which demonstrates its transitional nature.

In the previous chapter we have already considered the presence of traditional culture in prominent aspects of post-independence Somali drama. We have seen how proverbs, traditional alliteration and allusion to various sources of oral tradition are used in aspects such as the naming of plays and their characters. In the preceding sections of this chapter too, we have seen how extensively the playwright utilised one leading feature of Somali traditional culture, namely alliterative verse, in dealing with crucial issues of social and political relevance in contemporary society. We have also seen the influence of inherited literary tradition in the playwright's emphasis on the instructive message as well as his skilful use of such other techniques as singing and music. In the pages to follow I shall present more evidence demonstrating the organic union of old and new elements in Somali post-independence drama represented by *Shabeelnaagood*–we shall see how Xasan Shiikh Muumin has engaged more features derived from Somali oral tradition to tackle contemporary themes more effectively. In so doing Xasan lends credence to Mineke Schipper who contends that 'for modern African playwrights the oral tradition is still an important source of inspiration, even when they tackle contemporary themes such as the conflict of generations, corruption and Westernisation' (Schipper, 1982: 6).

To present his views on stage, in an artistic way rooted in Somali tradition, Xasan makes a full use of a blend of traditional techniques: proverbs, riddles, poetic questioning, allusion to familiar, heritage sources, as well as customary exchanges of wit and wisdom. Intimately carved as they are in the cultural memory of the Somali public, these traditional devices are meant to facilitate the playwright's delivery of his modern views against such old, social ills as clannism, as well as against newly emerged ones such as family disintegration and the destruction of young women's lives

by deceitful playboys in selfish pursuit of bodily pleasures.

Among the said traditional techniques employed by the playwright proverbs (in Somali *maahmaah*) stand out. The extensive use of proverbs and sayings throughout the play is unmistakable. This ranges from direct quotation in the traditional way to a rather transmuted style alluding to a familiar sayings without citing the original text as a whole, as witnessed in the titling of the plays illustrated in chapter 6. One example of the first case is found on page 90 of the print text of *Shabeelnaagood*, in the heated argument between Diiddan and Diiddane representing the eternal battle of the sexes or gender-based contest in Somali tradition:

> DIIDDAN: *I dhegayso haddaba. 'Af af loo waayey baa ba'ay' bay Soomaalidu ku maahmaahdaa*.
> Listen to me. Somalis have a proverb: 'Words to which no response is found
> will perish'.

In a less direct way, Shallaayo recalls a proverb in her response to Shabeel's bold advances when in their first meeting he claims that he is in love with her to the extent of dying for her. To express how surprised she is by his instant love claim before getting to know her, she utters a well known Somali proverb without introducing it as such. The proverb goes, '*maba dhalane dhawrtaysan ogaa*' (p. 68), literally translated by Andrzejewski as 'He hasn't even been born, yet how good he is at begging!' which may not make much sense to the non-Somali-speaking reader, as it is difficult to translate the decoding allusion into English. However, the point here is to provide another example illustrating the playwright's use of proverbs. This proverb is used to comment on someone who starts to do something (often negative) in an untimely manner, for example, when a bride shouts at her groom in the wedding ceremony on financial matters.

Another example is found in scene 4 where Diiddan alludes to a well known proverb when she says, '*daad nim uu xambaaraa, badbaadada xasuustee*' (p. 92) which means, 'A man carried away by flood-waters, sets his mind to his deliverance' (p. 93). This is derived from or alludes to the popular proverb, '*Nin*

daad qaaday xumbo cuskey' (A man carried away by flood-waters holds a foam for deliverance), cited to comment on the desperate attempt made by a person in need seeking assistance from someone who is not in a position to be of any help.

Another useful technique skilfully employed by the playwright is *halxiraale* (riddles) formulated in stylised, poetic questioning. The riddle is one of the very familiar elements in Somali oral tradition. It is used by both children and adults as an intelligence and personality test, among other purposes. One highly popular form of children's orature based on riddles is a verbal game called *googaalaysi*, which is practised throughout the Somali-inhabited territories in the Horn of Africa. I have already illustrated what *googaaleysi* is like in chapter 3, within our discussion of the various uses of *xarafraac* (alliteration) in Somali verbal art.

In the case of adult riddles, two main domains exist. The first is the poetic challenges, another established practice in Somali literary tradition. By custom, Somalis enjoy challenging each other in poetic duels; they test each other's intelligence and knowledge through poetic exchanges using a well-phrased, highly condensed language. As John Johnson observes, 'the use of concise language is perhaps most dramatically demonstrated with the poetic challenge, including the form in which a riddle is presented.' (Johnson, 1996: 41).

The exchange of riddles in poetic challenges is very common in both fields of Somali poetic practice elucidated in chapter 2, namely the *maanso-goleed* (public forum poetry) and the *hees* (song). In his extensive collection of Somali poems in *Heelloy*, Johnson (1996) cites two interesting *hirwo* couplets formulated in the form of a riddle and an answer to it exchanged by a man and a woman respectively in a dance ceremony. It goes as follows:

Question:

> *Wax aan hadhin hawlna kuu qabanoo*
> *Hortiina na jooga soo hela eey.*
>
> That which will not leave you, [nor] do [anything] useful for you,

And which remains [always] before you: find out [what it is].

Answer:

War wax aan hadhin hawlna kuu qabanoo,
Hortaada na jooga waa hooseey.

O man, that which will not leave you, [nor] do [anything useful for you,
And which remains [always] before you, is [your] shadow. (Johnson, 1996: 29-30).

A more complex example of the traditional use of the same technique is provided in the poetic contest between Dhiidhi Kadiye and Geelo presented in chapter 3. The lengthy, improvised, yet highly artistic duel, between the two early 19th century dancers is based on a host of improvised riddles, the answers of which require a high degree of wit and intelligence.

This kind of creative verbal challenge was most popular among young, marriageable men and women in their search for a suitable partner. Individual members of the opposing sexes challenged each other in dance-based entertainments as well as in normal encounters in day-to-day life. This often happened before switching to a more relaxed courtship, on the part of the young man, or before positively responding to him, on the part of the young woman, each wanting to boast his or her oratorical abilities and to show off the tougher side of his or her personality.[151]

Demonstrating their transitional status, Somali post-independence playwrights tended to revive these elements of traditional culture and made them serve the needs of a new art form–contemporary stage drama – which deals with issues of topical relevance to modern Somali society.

One of them is Cali Sugulle (1966) in his famous play, *Kalahaab* (Wide Apart) which treats the topical issue of family disintegration in modern Somalia. Cali Sugulle (1966) utilises the traditional techniques described above and in the process he presents the

151 Owing to the many hardships of life in an arid interior, toughness was an essential element in a respectable personality, according ot the pastoralist.

desirable qualities of a 'good woman' from the point of view of traditional society. In scene 16 of the play, a young man, Maxamed Axmed, who represents the new generation of urban Somalis, tells a friend of his, whose assistance he sought with regard to his great love for a very beautiful girl called Marwo, whom he wants to marry. Unlike Maxamed, his friend believes in the traditional way of choosing a wife and does not give much consideration to such things as 'love'. He preaches at Maxamed the necessity of well informed judgement based on the outcome of enquiries into the personal abilities of the girl as well as her ancestral origins, instead of giving up to her physical beauty.

Finally, Maxamed agrees to introduce his friend to the girl and allows him to examine her intelligence. After exchanging a few words of greetings and introduction, the man embarks on a poetic questioning sung in the traditional way of the *walasaqo* dance song. He puts to the girl a riddle comprising three questions about the differences between men and women in relation to the acceptable and unacceptable conducts, as follows:

MAN: *Hoobeey,*[152] O girl, There are three things
That are shameful to women,
Yet appropriated to men.
This is disguised speech,
Examine it like [a specimen of] meat
Tell me the essence of the words
If you can explain [them to me].

Singing in the same alliterative sound 's' and the same *Walasaqo* metre, the girl answers:

MARWO: Three things that are shameful to
women,
Are what I am about to explain to you,
If you want me to teach you
The art of poetry and singing.

One is eating too much.
Eating first [before women] and fast
Is appropriate to men,

152 As explained in chapter 3 'Hoobeey' and 'hoobeeyooy' are meaningless words used as rhythmic aids in this poetic genre.

To women, however, it is shameful.

MAN. Correct!

MARWO: The second is [about the extent
of] milking:
Men are permitted to milk several she-camels (simultaneously)[153]
Religion allows a man to have four wives
To women, however, this is a disgrace.

The third is something you disguised
For me [in person] and it is not suitable as a riddle. (Cali, 1966, *Kalahaab*, scene 16).

Later in the dialogue it is revealed that the third point is that in a man-woman relationship it is the man who is always expected to make the first advances to initiate a new relationship. If, however, the woman takes the initiative it is considered shameful. The play implies that Marwo understands the question but deliberately refuses to answer it. The underlying message is that the new generation of young women represented by Marwo wrongly reject complying with the old order which denies marriageable women the right to approach a prospective partner, rather than just waiting for him to do so.

Like Cali Sugulle in *Kalahaab,* Xasan Shiikh Muumin in *Shabeelnaagood* utilises riddles, poetic questioning and traditional alliteration combined to express issues of common concern to contemporary Somali society. This is illustrated in the following song exchanged in duet by Diiddan and Diiddane in the subordinate plot. It was one of the most important songs in *Shabeelnaagood* which Kapteijns has described as being 'popular songs of great artistry and compelling intellectual content' (p.106). In this powerful dialogue which takes the form of poetic riddles, the playwright engages the potential of traditional culture as a tool for dealing with the complex political problems of the day. He sums up his critique of the state of affairs in his country in four questions and their answers. The exchange follows the style of Somali traditional poetic riddles described above. Each question is designed to address one of the four

153 This is a metaphor. Milking several she-camels simultaneously stands for having several female partners.

major areas of social life: politics, economy, culture and religion, all of which are depicted as being neglected or mismanaged by those in power. The exchanges go as follows:

DIIDDANE: *Doc kastoo la eego*
Nolosha dunidu waa dabkee
Hadduu dabkii dhaxamoodo
Maxaa lagu diiriyaa?
Waa tilmaan la daahoo
Degdeg kuma habboonee
Adoo deggen u fiirsoo
Ujeeddada i deeqsii (p. 62).

Wherever one looks, life
depends on fire;
But if fire itself feels cold, what can one heat it with?
This is a matter screened off from sight and which does not profit from haste;
Bestow upon me calmly and at leisure, the gift of your opinion.

DIIDDAN: *Ruux haddii la doortoo*
Darajadii la saariyo
Xilkii daryeeli waayo
Dab dhaxamooday weeyee.
Waa su'aal da'weynoo
Madaxa dalinaysee,
Wixii lagu diirinaayo
Dadweynahaa la weydiin (ibid).

When a man is elected and
placed in his high office
And yet does nothing to fulfil his trust, he is the fire which feels cold.
This is a very old question, which makes ones head grow weary;
It is the people, then, who will be asked how to bring back the heat to the fire.

DIIDDANE: *Durudurkaa laga cabbaa*
Biyihiis lagu dabbaashaa
Hadduu harraad dareemo
Darkee laga waraabshaa?

Waa tilmaan la daahoo
Degdeg kuma habboonee
Adoo deggen u fiirsoo
Ujeeddada i deeqsii (pp. 62 – 64).

People drink flowing water,

and swim in it too
But if the water itself feels thirsty, from what trough can one quench its thirst?
This is a matter screened off from sight and which does not profit from haste;
Bestow upon me calmly and at leisure, the gift of your opinion.

DIIDDAN: *Ruuxa duunyo haystee*
Dahabkana barkanayee
Wixiisii deeqi waayeen
Durudur oomay weeyee.

Waa su'aal da'weynoo
Madaxa dalinaysee,
Wixii lagu diirinaayo
Dadweynahaa la weydiin (p. 64).

If a man possesses wealth and
rests on gold for his pillow
And yet all his riches do not satisfy him
He is the water stricken with thirst.
This is a very old question , which makes one's head grow weary;
It is people, then, who will be asked, from what through the water can quench its thirst.

DIIDDANE: *Qofkii cudur dilaayo*
Dawadaa bogsiisee
Hadday dawo bukooto
Maxaa lagu dabiibaa?
Waa tilmaan la daahoo

Degdeg kuma habboonee
Adoo deggen u fiirsoo
Ujeeddada I deeqsii.

A medicine brings health to

the man whom illness assails,

But if the medicine itself feels ill, what can one cure it with?

This is a matter screened off from sight and which does not profit from

haste;

Bestow upon me calmly and at leisure, the gift of your opinion.

DIIDDAN: *Dallaallimada diintiyo*

Distoorka iyo xeerka

Haddii dabool la saaro
Dawo bukootay weeyee.
Waa su'aal da'weynoo
Madaxa dalinaysee,
Wixii lagu diirinaayo
Dadweynahaa la weydiin.

If the straight path of faith
The constitution and the laws
Are dimmed and covered up
It is they that are the medicine which feels ill.
This is a very old question, which makes one's head grow weary;
It is the people, then, who will be asked what the medicine can be cured with.

DIIDDANE: *Subagga dufankiisaa*
Dadku ku dhaashadaan e
Hadduu dufan basaaso
Xaggee dux looga doonaa?

Waa tilmaan la daahoo

Degdeg kuma habboonee
Adoo deggen u fiirsoo
Ujeeddada i deeqsii (ibid)..

It is with an unguent of ghee
That people oil themselves,
But if the unguent feels dry, where can one look for oiliness to restore its efficacy?
This is a matter screened off from sight and which does not profit from haste; Bestow upon me calmly and at leisure, the gift of your opinion.

DIIDDAN: *Dhaqanku dugsi weeyaan*
Dalkiisu uu ku dhaatee
Haddii dadkiisu aaso
Dufan basaasay weeyee.
Waa su'aal da'weynoo
Madaxa dalinaysee,
Wixii lagu diirinaayo
Dadweynahaa la weydiin (ibid).

Our heritage is a shelter and a refuge
And the country looks on it with pride,
But if its own people bury it, it is an unguent which feels dry.
This is a very old question, which makes one's head grow weary;

> It is the people, then, who will be asked where one can look for oiliness to restore its efficacy.

Commenting on this song, Lidwien Kapteijns remarks that

> It is a direct criticism of the inefficient and corrupt civilian administrations that governed Somalia until the military take-over of 1969. Predating the military coup by one year, the song brilliantly captures and gives expression to the widespread popular discontent that existed in Somalia before the military coup and that caused many Somalis to initially welcome the military intervention (Kapteijns, 1999: 126).

Closely looking at the text, one observes that the playwright highlights each of the problems referred to and then leaves the solution to the public. By spelling out the concluding statement of the refrain, '*dadweynahaa la weydiin*' (it is the people then who will be asked), he intends to make sure that the audience is involved and more concerned with the issues raised in the play. He invites his audience to more actively take part in the theatrical debate beyond the stage; he wants them to engage in a collective thinking about adequate solutions to the problems raised. He even endeavours to go further and call for action, as is obvious from his verses elsewhere in the play, when, for instance, he says in the collective voice of the cast, '*Hurdow toos, xaqiyo baaddilkaan kala hufaynaaye*' (p. 212) 'Awake, you who are asleep, we winnow right from wrong!' and, in the words of Diiddane, '*Dulmiga aynu sheegnay, dembigeeda ciddii lihi, siday maanta ku deyso, innagu aan ku dadaallo*.' (p. 144)
'Those who bear the guilt for the evil we described
Should now desist from it–that is what we must struggle for!'

That seems to be the bottom line of the instructive message which the playwright is focussing on throughout the play. He seemingly attempts to turn the stage into a forum for debate at various levels, from igniting heated arguments between young men and women (represented by Diiddane and Diiddan) to raising complex poetic questioning of political and philosophical content (above).

It is important to note that in this particular scene (scene 2), the playwright relates the social problems of marriage break-down, family disintegration and victimisation of

children and young women, to their wider context characterised by social, political and cultural vices and inefficiencies. 'It is the disregard of the law that has destroyed the things which are binding' (p. 135). The passage cited above encompasses all these elements in an artistically compressed fashion.

6.5 Conclusion

Through the in-depth analysis of the representative play, *Shabeelnaagood*, I hope to have presented in this chapter ideas and evidence supporting the existence of transitional characteristics in this play. The transitional nature of the play is discerned at two levels. At one level it mirrors social problems emerging in a society in transition, problems emanating from the transitional state of the society as a whole, a society where, in the playwright's view, people have started falling away from their traditional moral code of right and wrong and finding no adequate replacement as yet. In such a border-line position between the old and the new, they find it difficult to 'winnow right from wrong' (p. 213). That is why the playwright took it upon himself to 'guide the public rightly' (p. 45).

I discussed how the transitional characteristic of the play is evident in its themes, its characters and its techniques. The themes, for instance, are of a transitional nature in the sense that they are the product of a certain historical period, a period of transition, 'a period of stress and change in Somali history' (Johnson, 1996: 219); they are also transitional in the sense that they deal with problems which the playwright considers are of transitory character, problems which did not exist in traditional Somali society and which, in the playwright's view, are likely to change in the future (explained above). In respect of the characters, their transitional status is illustrated in their self-dividedness between traditional and modern influences.

At another level, I have discussed with special emphasis how the transitional nature of the play is manifest in the playwright's message-focussedness and in his extensive use of traditional techniques to deal with topical issues of relevance to modern society. I have provided evidence showing that both of these tendencies are carried over from established, Somali, literary tradition.

Here it is important to note the existence of close links between the author of *Shabeelnaagood* in his employment of traditional techniques for modern purposes and the practice of the transitional poets discussed in the proceeding chapters who did the same, i.e., they employed traditional techniques, e.g., *xarafraac* (alliteration) and *miisaan* (metre) to compose poetry dealing with topical issues, poetry which, moreover, incorporates modern innovations side by side with the traditional elements (see chapter 3). This indicates again the inter-relatedness of Somali poetry and drama (Kapteijns, 1999) in various aspects including their shared characteristic as transitional art forms.

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this concluding chapter is to sum up the main arguments and conclusions of the study and to see whether the research objectives posited in chapter 1 have been achieved. The chapter also summarises the new contributions made by this study alongside its inevitable limitations. Based on this, a number of recommendations for further research will be made.

The research problem was to examine the existence of transitional characteristics in the twin literary forms of post-independence Somali poetry and drama in the context of a period of transition in Somali history. The research objectives formulated to guide this investigation have been:

- to look into salient features of post-independence Somali poetry and determine whether these features display evidence that this poetry is in a state of transition;

- to identify and analyse major aspects of post-independence Somali drama and discern the presence of evidence of similar, transitional characteristics in this drama as well.

To achieve these objectives an extensive work of collecting data and analysing it has been undertaken. Different research methods have been applied, including the examination of source texts, interviews, archival research and open-ended conversations with resource persons. Primary source materials have been given special consideration. Secondary sources have also been consulted.

7.2 Main arguments and conclusions

One central conclusion suggested by the results of this research has been that both post-independence Somali poetry and drama appear to be in a transitional state, transitional in the sense that they are both in a passage between traditional and modern ways of cultural expression; also transitional in the sense that they represent the experience of a period of transition in Somali history, of which they are both product and expression. A detailed discussion making clear the sense in which the terms 'transition', modern' and 'traditional' are used in this context is offered in chapter1. Definitions of other terms frequently used in this thesis are also discussed in chapter 2. Based on a review of the existing literature carried out in chapter 1, I have argued that this subject, i.e. the transitional nature of post-independence Somali poetry and drama, has never been considered in previous, scholarly work; this study therefore attempts to bridge this gap, or in other words, to make a new, original contribution to the study of Somali literature.

Based on the literature review again, as well as on the research results, I have identified two more areas which have been overlooked in the previous scholarship on Somali poetry. The first is nomenclature and the second is the emerging trends and the changes that have been taking place in the post-independence Somali poetry, giving it its transitional nature. While the existence of the first of these two issues was previously noticed and touched upon by a few scholars the second has thus far escaped scholarly notice. Johnson in his book *"heelloy"* (Johnson, 1996b) brings our attention to the existence of this problem when he states that 'the most serious difficulty I faced in the book was nomenclature. Trying to find the appropriate term in English for a Somali word or for some problem not named at all in Somali was very tiresome' (p. xix). However, the problem has never been addressed in a published scholarly discussion to date, at least to the knowledge of the present author.

While a detailed discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of this study, I have attempted to pay it some attention in chapter 1 with two main purposes in mind. The

first has been to avoid possible ambiguity in my use of terminology in the thesis, which is divergent in some cases from the way in which certain terms were used in previous literature on the subject; and the second purpose is to bring this issue to scholarly attention for further research and also to shed some light on it with a view to make an initial contribution to the future settlement of this problem.

The second issue, i.e., the emerging changes and the resultant transitional characteristic of post-independent Somali poetry, is one of two main areas of focus in the present research, the other being the nature of post-independence Somali drama. Guided by the first objective of this study (see above) chapters 2 and 3 are allocated to investigate the transitional characteristic of post-independence Somali poetry through analysing the research results pertaining to the salient features of this poetry, with special focus on aspects of form.

As a result, significant changes and new trends have been detected in five important aspects in the post-independence poetry. One major aspect is the change in genre preference. The pre-dominance of the *gabay* (a long-lined genre) in traditional Somali versification appears to have gone out of fashion. In its place, a number of *beyd-gaab* (short-lined) genres, predominantly the *jiifto*, has taken precedence. A second, significant change has been observed in the style of presentation. The element *luuq* (melodic chant) which had always featured the recitation of traditional Somali poetry has also gone out of fashion; its use has virtually vanished in the post-independence poetry. Similarly, the research results suggest that the use of *arar* (extensive poetic introduction), which, like the *luuq*, used to be a major feature in the presentation of the classical poem,[154] substantially dwindled; so did the feature *faan* (poetic boasting), another once salient feature in Somali classical poetry.

Drawing on the results of my extensive, extra-textual investigation,[155] I have argued that all of the traditional features above have gone out of fashion under the pressure

154 See chapter 2 for explanation of the use of the term ‘classical’ in this study and in previous work on Somali poetry.

155 For instance, four leading poets who participated in a panel discussion I attended on the new trends in post-independence Somali poetry, held in Djibouti on 23 February, 2006 (see chapter 1), confirmed that this is the main reason, in their view.

of modern influence. Post-independence poets believe that the tastes of their contemporary audience have changed in such a way that they no longer appreciate the above aspects that are disappearing; they believe that members of the younger generation tend to frown upon these old features, seeing them as time wasting.[156]

The fifth change has been detected in the method of transmission. The mouth-to-ear transmission, or what Ong (1982: 11) terms 'primary orality', seems to be a thing of the past. The research results analysed in chapter 3 have suggested that the dominant method of transmission used by post-independence Somali poets is one that may be seen as located somewhere between orality and writing, in the sense that orality, writing and modern technology are blended, with a gradual increase in the use of writing. In other words, it may be described as a new orality aided by modern technology and by a degree of writing. This demonstrates a transitional state. Most contemporary poets first write down their verses as they compose them, not for the purpose of transmitting them in a written form but in order not to forget them. (Andrzejewski, 1974: 3). They then tape record the poems or present them in a radio or television broadcast, reading them from their hand-written script.[157]

While the analysis of the above changes is presented in chapter 3, the discussion of the transitional characteristic detected in the post-independence Somali poetry is continued in chapter 4 which focuses on the other end of the transition ladder, namely on the aspects that have remained unchanged. Following a preliminary discussion of the fundamentals of Somali versification rules, the chapter presents evidence that the two traditional, structural devices that have always regulated Somali verse have remained unchanged. These are *xaraf-raac* (alliteration) and *miisaan* (metre).

The research results discussed in chapters 3 and 4, which complement each other as they do, lead to the conclusion that the combination of the changes taking place in the five traditional features discussed in chapter 3 on the one hand, and the continued use of the other traditional techniques described in chapter 4 on the other,

156 Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac "Gaarriye", field notes, 23 February, 2006. Also see above.
157 See above.

offer a clear demonstration that this poetry is in a state of transition between tradition and modernity. This makes us conclude that the first objective of the present study has been achieved and that this study has contributed to the reversal of the situation described in chapter 1, that the changes and new trends taking place in post-independence Somali poetry and the transitional nature which these changes have given to this poetry are yet to be considered in the scholarly work on Somali literature. By doing so I hope that this study has helped bring this subject matter to scholarly attention and that it has provided future researchers with a framework to operate from. This represents one facet of the importance of this study.

To achieve the second objective of the study, chapters 5 and 6 have been allocated to explore and analyse the major aspects of post-independence Somali drama: its themes, characters, dramatic techniques and method of production; as well as the inclinations of its playwrights. While chapter 5 examines these aspects in reference to a wide variety of popular plays belonging to the post-independence period, chapter 6, one of the largest chapters, entirely focuses on the in-depth analysis of one representative play, namely *Shabeelnaagood*, for reasons explained at the beginning of the chapter. The chapter explores and analyses the major dramatic aspects listed above as they occur in this representative play, which is considered as 'a fine example of the genre' (Andrzejewski, 1974: vi). Our quest has been to detect the existence of transitional elements in each of these components of the play. One of the important observations has been that the playwright uses various elements carried over from Somali oral tradition. These include alliterative verse, riddles, proverbs and poetic questioning. He uses them with the purpose to adjust them to fit the needs of the topical themes of the play, themes which respond to the pressures of modern life. Other important findings include the playwright's 'issue-orientedness', to borrow a phrase from Said (1982). Evidence is presented showing that such an inclination is a carry-over inherited from traditional, Somali, literary creators and this indicates the transitional status of this playwright, which is reflected in his play.

The extensive examination of the written text of the play, cross-checked with an audio-recorded version has provided evidence that *Shabeelnaagood* can be considered as a play of transitional character. This conclusion is supported by the

results of my interviews with the playwright and with two of the leading actors of the play.[158] The conclusion is also analogous to the author's memory of the live performance of the play at the Somali National theatre in 1968.

The discussion of the stated major aspects of Somali post-independence drama in chapters 5 and 6 has unveiled clear evidence supporting the central hypothesis of this study that, like the poetry, the post-independence Somali drama too is in a state of transition. This has helped achieve the second objective of the study. Here I hope that this study makes another important, original contribution to the study of Somali literature by filling in, however modestly, the existing gap represented by the absence of serious studies in English on Somali drama and by uncovering the nature of this drama as an art in transition. That is where another facet of the importance of the present study emerges.

7.3 Summary of the relevance and contributions of this study

The relevance and originality of this study emulate from the fact that it has broken new ground by carrying out original research in areas that have never been explored in scholarly works. One of these is the identification of the changes that have been taking place in Somali poetry since independence. Linked to this is the transitional nature which these changes have given to this poetry. Another new contribution is the uncovering for the first time of the nature of the post-independence Somali drama – which is closely related to the poetry – as a transitional art form. The highlighting of the links that these literary developments have with the dramatically changing conditions – historical, political, economical and cultural – in Somalia is equally important. A deeper understanding of the dynamic developments of post-independence Somali literature in its dialectical relation with the social and political context may provide insights into the underlying root causes of the current Somali predicament. This may help us better understand the Somali realities.

In addition to these main contributions to knowledge in this field, the present study has unveiled and discussed a number of emerging developments in post-

158 See chapter 6.

independence Somali poetry summarised below:

- the emerging precedence of short-lined genres over the long-lined in general and the *gabay* in particular, in dealing with serious issues;
- the increasing pre-eminence of the *jiifto* in this process as the successor of the *gabay* in the public forum poetry; the *jiifto* metre has also replaced the *dhaanto* one in structuring the modern song, the second of the two types of modern Somali poetry; although other metre types are also used in this field, *jiifto* has been identified as the lead one;
- the disappearance of the *luuq* (melodic chant), *arar* (extensive poetic introduction) and *faan* (poetic boasting) in the post-independence poetry;
- the contribution of *Kabacad* poets to the development of modern Somali poetry and the existence, nature and role of their *qaraami gabay* as the first form of modern Somali poetry, which paved the way for the development of the modern song in its different stages.

Furthermore, I hope that this study has made a modest, original contribution to the better understanding and further development of nomenclature and categorisation of Somali poetry types, by highlighting the following, bringing them to scholarly attention:

- the Somali perception of the concept *maanso* as the generic name for *all* types of poetry, which means that this Somali term is an analogy to the English term 'poetry';
- deeper understanding of the categorisation of Somali poetry into *maanso-goleed* (not just *maanso*) and *hees*, taking into account that *hees* (song) is

maanso but not *maanso-goleed* (public forum poetry);

- understanding that the word *hees* is the generic name for all types of light poetry, meant basically for entertainment, which is divided into the two sub-categories of *hees-hiddeed* (traditional song) and *hees-casri* (modern song);

- highlight the Somali conceptions of '*heello*', '*hees*' and '*qaraami*', clarifying their use by Somalis; this may help a more accurate use of these terms in future scholarly discussions;

- elucidating the distinction between the *jiifto* and the *masafo*, concluding that they are two entirely different genres. This may help towards resolving the existing confusion between the two genres.

7.4 Limitations and recommendations for further research

The present study, like any other, is not without limitations and problems. As I mentioned earlier in chapter 1, the resource centres in the Somali capital Mogadishu, the main site for Somali literary heritage, were destroyed by the civil war, and the safety situation of the city does not allow research visits. This has presented one limitation to the present study. However, this limitation was made less serious by the fact that a substantial amount of source materials as well as a great number of Somali literature practitioners made their way outside Somalia for safety. Hence, I was able to get access to and consult these sources in places such as the UK, Djibouti and Hargeysa where I was able to gather substantial information necessary for this research.

Another limitation is that, while the present study includes the description of samples of recent Somali songs in the diaspora, its scope does not extend to a more detailed discussion of the new body of Somali literature – mostly poetry – in exile and the extent to which the transitional characteristics discussed in this study are reflected in

the more recent work practiced mainly by young, emerging poets and dramatists in the diaspora. This brings us to the recommendations for further research, with which the current study concludes.

My first recommendation generates from the above limitation of the current study. A separate research focusing on the new phenomenon of Somali literature in exile, practiced by younger poets and dramatists exposed to foreign influences, would benefit the development of Somali literary studies. The focus of such research would include the types and characteristics of this exiled literature, the nature and tendencies of its creators and the extent to which the changes that have been taking place in post-independence Somali poetry and drama are continued or otherwise in the new literature in exile.

Another recommendation would be to explore the underlying factors behind the continued use of the old poetic devices of alliteration and metre in Somali versification, irrespective of the modern-oriented movement attempting to free modern Somali verse from the restrictions of these devices. Undertaking research work looking into the factors that helped the continued use of alliteration and metre in comparison with those which led to the divergence from other aspects of the same traditional poetic form, such as the *luuq* and the *arar*, would help towards a deeper understanding of the new trends and developments in Somali versification.

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